Marxism Today

February 1987 95p

Labour and Defence

Beatrix Campbell on the Loony Left

Valentine's Day

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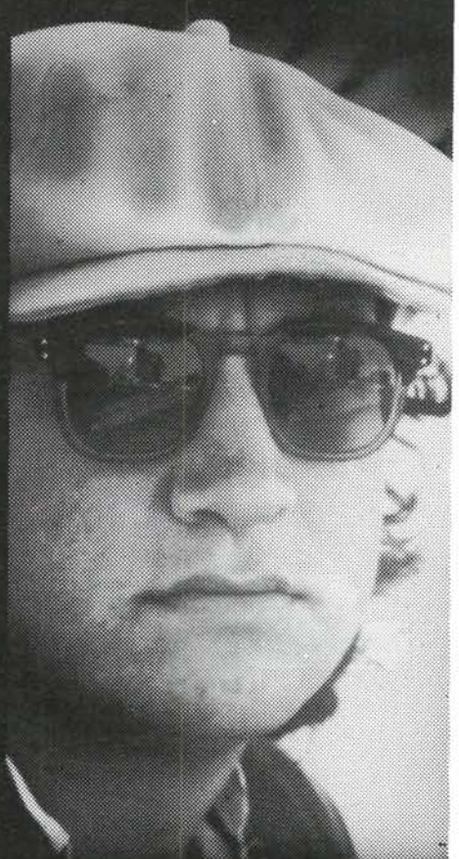

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French Lessons

Recent events in France have taken even the most optimistic leftwing observers by surprise. The French Right had seemed to be enjoying a prolonged honeymoon period following its electoral victory of March 1986, its political support remaining solid after more than six months of radical reforms. France appeared to be settling into a right-dominated consensus, in which Prime Minister Chirac's strong-arm neogaullism was winning wide popular support, particularly on law and order issues, and President Mitterrand was being reduced to employing delaying tactics without any opportunity of taking the political initiative. Chirac was apparently proving that co-habitation with a Socialist president could operate smoothly: to the Right's advantage.

However, things livened up unexpectedly in mid-November with a massive protest movement by school and university students against the government's bill intended to tighten up university entrance. With the decline of radicalism in the universities, the new generation of French students seemed several light years away from the post-1968 radicals. Depoliticised and more individualistic, they had apparently accepted the rules of the game in what remains a highly unequal and crisis-stricken university system. Nobody then expected that the first effective shots against the neoliberal policies of the Chirac government would be fired from the universities.

The three weeks of student demonstrations, however, were no re-run of May 68. Their demands were less global, and less overtly political. Trade unions and the traditional left political parties and groups were kept at arms-length as the students addressed themselves directly, and successfully, to public opinion. Undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Chirac government had to back down was that it failed to make the student strike unpopular (a poll carried out during the strike showed more than 60% popular support), particularly after the death of Malik Oussekine at the hands of the traditionally brutal riot police.

During the strike, Chirac not only had to deal with the students, but also some backstabbing within his own government coalition, overt criticism from his rightwing rival in the next presidential election, Raymond Barre, and the inevitable banana skins strewn around by Mitterrand.

Having been humiliated into abandoning his university 'reforms', and with them his tough guy image, Chirac could only have expected that his troubles were just beginning. Days after the end of the students' strike, a spontaneous unofficial strike broke out among the railway workers, quickly paralysing rail transport throughout France. The character of this strike owed much to the students (and not ony because they had shown that victory was possible): the railway workers took over the idea of daily general meetings and the insistence on direct forms of democracy, and some even set up a national co-ordinating com-

Frank Spooner Pictures

The demonstrations that wiped the smile off Chirac's face

Chirac vs Mitterrand

Do you have a favourable opinion of President Mitterrand?
December 1986
Yes 56%
No 39%
January 1987
Yes 58%
No 38%

Are you confident that Chirac can resolve the country's problems?
December 1986
Yes 53%
No 41%
January 1987 (after student strike and start of railway strike)
Yes 46%
No 49%

Source: Sofres Poll published in *Le Figaro Magazine*, 10 January 1987

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mittee which bore a striking resemblance to that of the students.

The strikers' demands were close to those of their official unions (over work conditions and wages, and opposing management plans to introduce new criteria for promotion based on individual 'merit'), but the unions nonetheless had some initial difficulties adapting as the strike turned into the longest on the railways for 40 years. Whereas the Communist CGT seemed at home with the new forms of grassroots democracy, and constantly supported the more militant sectors, the other major union federations, the CFDT and FO, tended to adopt more accommodating positions. The CGT alone tried – with only partial success – to extend the strike to other parts of the public sector.

Much more was at stake than during the student protest: the railway workers' wage claims, if met, were likely to snowball through the public sector and seriously undermine the government's austerity policies. A major social crisis would not only have put Chirac's government in danger, but also changed the political landscape of left-right cohabitation. Mitterrand was aware that a little social unrest does him good in the opinion polls, but that major upheaval could make life awkward for him in the run-up to the presidential elections. Chirac knew that the failure of co-habitation to deliver the goods would strengthen Barre, who has been opposed from the outset to what he considers to be an impossible compromise.

If the labour movement has failed in its first attempt to get its act together after years of apathy and disaffection, then this is largely due to these pressures towards 'national unity' between the government and the president. However, both students and railworkers have provided ample proof that the road from serfdom looks like being a pretty bumpy one for the French neo-liberals. ●

Keith Dixon

Guinness' Flawed Genius

'Happy 1987 from Guinness' is the cheery message on poster sites throughout the country. 'Unhappy 1987' is the message from Guinness' boardroom as £375,000 a year chairman and chief executive Ernest Saunders is sacked and three other directors quit in a scandal which shows just how perilous the City can be for its new found Sids and their money. It is the City's first big bang after Big Bang.

On December 1, 1986, Guinness entered its own Book of Records as the biggest company ever to be formally investigated by the Department of Trade. The DTI inspectors were following-up allegations of illegality in the Guinness takeover of the Distillers whisky and gin group, finalised in April 1986. They acted on a tip-off from the American Securities and Exchange Commission which has just fined Ivan Boesky £100m for insider trading. Boesky was a Distillers shareholder.

Since then, barely a day has passed without details of Guinness' secretive and sometimes allegedly illegal deals leaking out. Much of it reads like pulp fiction. There is a £200m slush fund, a 'war cabinet', a secret $100m transatlantic deal and a covert support operation. There are bank accounts in London, Zurich Vienna, New York and elsewhere.

But it is not pulp fiction. It concerns £3billion, largely from pension and insurance funds. It also concerns the future of thousands of jobs in the Scotch whisky industry.

It is not immediately clear why a 200-year-old brewery whose products are more widely sold in the UK and Ireland than any other alcoholic drink should need slush funds and offshore bank accounts: funny money doesn't sell beer.

For the answer, go back to the early 80s. The champagne and claret quaffers of the City then saw Guinness as a 'sleepy' declining brewery surrounded by a ragbag of 150 businesses ranging from sweets to canal boat holidays. What Guinness needed was management. It got that by headhunting Saunders from Nestle.

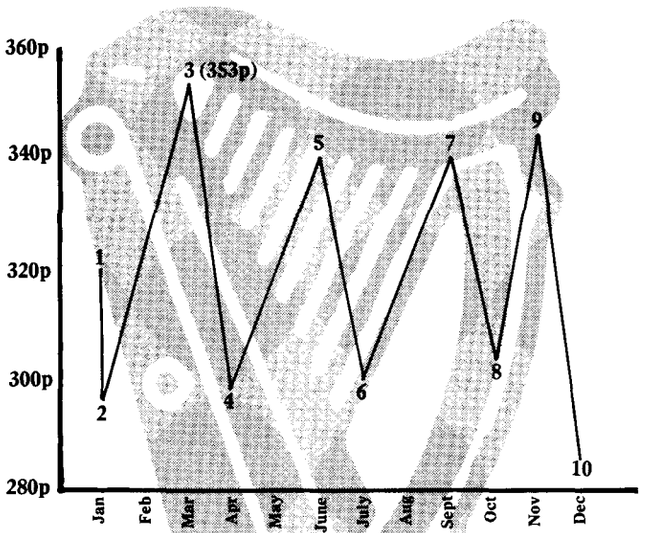
He 'rationalised' – cutting down, selling off and closing up parts of the business. He ditched the Guinnless campaign in favour of the Genius campaign. Profits and the share price went up. But there is a limit to 'rationalisation', so the inevitable next stage is growth by takeover.

Cash now plays little part in takeovers. Besides creating a tax problem, bids are now so large that no company can afford the money. Instead of cash, the bidder now offers to swap shares in the target company with those of its own. They literally buy assets with paper.

Saunders, by now synonymous with Guinness in the City, flexed his muscles on a chain of newsagents and then took over the Arthur Bell Scotch group in an acrimonious bid battle. In early 1986, when City gossip suggested that Guinness could itself be a takeover target, Saunders saw his chance of a deal that would treble both the profits and the total value of his company's shares. The giant Distillers group, which gave the world Johnny Walker, Gordon's gin and thalidomide was in a mess. Friendless in the City, at the end of 1985 it was fending off an unwelcome takeover challenge from Jimmy Gulliver's Argyll group.

Saunders, in secret talks with Distillers, secured their approval for a friendly merger, which was to be on his own terms. The worth of his bid depended entirely on the value of Guinness shares. At March 20 1986, the Argyll bid looked set to win, with the Guinness share price weak at 280p. Over the next fortnight Guinness shares moved to a peak 353p, a move that clinched the deal, putting Guinness' price for Distillers up from £2 billion to £2.5 billion

Guinness share price fluctuations and their causes in 1986



1 Guinness seen as takeover target
2 Guinness bids
3 Shares 'supported'
4 Support withdrawn
5 Stockbrokers encourage purchases
6 Saunders reneges on promise to appoint Scot
7 Institutions give Saunders vote of confidence
8 Shares drift with stockmarket
9 Stockbrokers upgrade profits forecasts and encourage purchases
10 Department of Trade probe launched

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at no cost to Guinness. At the time, the sudden share surge seemed inexplicable. Now it is obvious that Guinness was mobilising its friends and its bankers to 'support' and push up the share price. Methods ranged from indemnities through its bankers to guarantee the buy-back price of shares purchased, to the illegal purchase of its own shares. At the same time, Guinness was driving down the value of Argyll shares.

In the context of the mega-bid atmosphere of the past two years, which has made billion pound deals commonplace, it is stretching credulity to suggest that no other company has availed itself of similar opportunities. Guinness was only rumbled because Ivan Boesky found it more expedient to pay his $100m fine and sing than to go to prison.

Government and the City will paint the Guinness episode as an aberration. It is seen as un-British. The BBC now surpasses *Private Eye* in its references to Saunders' pre-war Austrian origin and his decision to anglicise his name. The other directors to quit are respectively Swiss, French and American – a truly cosmopolitan crew who fail to understand English niceties.

But Guinness was not an aberration. It responded to the logic of what the City demanded and what the government condoned by its failure to refer the bid to the Monopolies Commission. Had Guinness not helped its share price up by 25% in late March 1986, its chances of winning Distillers would have been minimal. That would have been disastrous in the eyes of the City for Guinness' future, and calamatous for Saunders' image. The stakes were just too high to allow for failure.

Saunders' genius went so far, but the scale of the Guinness operation and degree of illegality slanted the odds against him. His nemesis was to be found out – not by the City or DTI – but by the tough regulators of the New York stock market. ●

Tony Levene

Frank Spooner Pictures

The Gorbachev leadership seems anxious to disentangle itself from the Afghan war.

Ceasefire In The Balance

Nearly nine years after the advent of a Communist Party regime in Kabul, and over seven years since Soviet troops were sent in to prevent that regime from being overthrown by rightwing rebels, there is now some chance of a turning-point in the conflict. In early January, the leader of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Najibullah, announced a ceasefire to come into effect on January 15; and on February 11 the indirect negotiations between Pakistan, the USSR and the PDPA regime are scheduled to reconvene, under UN auspices, in Geneva.

It was not the Soviet Union that initiated the current war in Afghanistan. This conflict has its roots in the attempts by reforming governments in Kabul to impose their policies upon the countryside. Such reform attempts had provoked revolts well before the 1978 advent of the PDPA to power, but it was in the months after April 1978 that rural resistance, inflamed by the arbitrary, and at times brutal, methods of the reformers, and further encouraged by Pakistan, China and the CIA, came to pervade most of the country. The Soviet intervention of 1979 was designed both to restrain the PDPA and make it more cautious, and to hold off the rebels until the Kabul state could stand on its own feet.

UN-sponsored talks have been in train since 1982, and documents have been drawn up covering four aspects of a settlement: the return of refugees (up to 5m out of a total population of around 15m); the withdrawal of Soviet troops; guarantees of the 'non-aligned' status of Afghanistan; and an agreement by Pakistan and Afghanistan not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. Agreement is said to have been reached on all issues, including, most recently, on the means of monitoring the Soviet withdrawal, but the timetable for this last item still remains unclear. The Russians are now hinting that they may agree to pull out over three years.

A number of developments over the past few months have made the prospect of a settlement somewhat more likely. The most important is the changed situation within Afghanistan, where Soviet and Afghan government troops have scored greater successes on the battlefield, and a significant number of guerrilla leaders have accepted local truces. External changes have also helped: the Gorbachev leadership is evidently much keener on a political settlement; the disarray of Washington's covert operations policy after Irangate has weakened US credibility; and Pakistan itself is being pressured from within to solve the problem before the 3-4m Afghan refugees become a major threat to domestic stability.

This Soviet pull-out will be conditional on Pakistan ending its support for the guerrillas. In other words, the Russians are not prepared to allow the PDPA regime to be overthrown. They favour 'national reconciliation'; the incorporation into the government of non-communist, nationalist, religious and tribal political forces, but this regime would still retain a PDPA core.

It remains to be seen if the West will accept this. A Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is a real possibility, but only in return for an end to support for the guerrillas by Pakistan and its backers. ●

Fred Halliday

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Too Little Too Late

It is just over three years since I met and buddied a person with Aids. By now you should have had the government's new Aids leaflet. Three years and 600 cases later everyone is being informed about Aids. But in these days of 'value for money', is the campaign itself useful, and being effectively co-ordinated? There are doubts.

Aids is forcing us to re-evaluate our lives, yet right now we are seeing a weak government campaign: one that increases fear, but does little to inform. In a bid to co-ordinate existing Aids education and publicity, and to bring all future projects under its own control, the government is dismantling the independent charity, the Health Education Council, and replacing it with a new body, the Health Education Authority, to be integrated into the NHS.

A body that draws upon the resources and experience of the NHS is to be welcomed, if indeed those resources and experiences are used fully and funded properly. An extra £10m has been promised by the government, doubling the Health Education Council's budget. But it is doubtful if this can support the present work of the council, as well as the new demands of the Aids crisis.

To date it seems that the government has not even heeded the advice of its own special Aids committee. The Health Education Authority may suffer the same fate. The fear of those working in the field is that the vast medical and counselling skills of the NHS, Terrence Higgins Trust and Body Positive, will be ignored.

It is hoped that by April 1 the new body will have been formed, and clear goals set. However, even when it is running, the Health Education Authority, being a government body, is unlikely to have the structures to react quickly and effectively at different turns of the crisis. ●

Martin Weaver

Flagship Or Flop?

The arrival of *News on Sunday* – expected launch date April 5 or April 12 – is being greeted with a good deal of scepticism in Fleet Street. It's not just that newspaper launches have lost their rarity value. There is a pervasive feeling that this one won't work. It's said to be under-capitalised, woolly headed in its journalistic ideals and, above all, run by lefties who, it is well known, are congenital failures when it comes to business. The passionate row between John Pilger, the editor in chief, and Keith Sutton, the editor, ending with Pilger's garrulous departure, has seemed to confirm this image of amateurism.

Undoubtedly, the paper faces a tough time. Maxwell's *Sunday Mirror* and Murdoch's *News of the World* have huge resources to pit against the £10m capital available to *NoS*. And the Sunday newspaper market has anyway been declining for some years.

The Fleet Street scepticism may however be badly misplaced. Technically the paper is well prepared. The paper's Manchester editorial offices will be using direct input and facsimile transmission technology with full union co-operation. The paper's initial 1.6m copies will be printed on the excellent, if true blue, web offset presses of the *Daily Telegraph* in Manchester and London's docklands. Sixty per cent of the print will be in London; the remainder in Manchester. A £1.3m launch has been prepared by the prestigious creative agency Bartle, Bogle and Hegarty (of Levi 501s fame) which will stress the paper's populism and its uniqueness.

Although the finances are predicated on sale settling down at at a sizeable 800,000 in the first year, building to 1.1m in the third year, *News on Sunday* can justifiably claim to be one of the most thoroughly researched newspaper projects Britain has known. Indeed the idea was conceived before *Today*, and has been the subject of repeated subsequent readership surveys. That research, completed over a year ago, showed that there was no market gap for a left-wing *Observer*, but that there was a niche further down market for a campaigning paper that treated its readership with respect.

The paper will also develop regional supplements, including local listings, within nine months of launch. The £1.5m finance for these supplements is to be raised through the Business Expansion Scheme. The readership surveys undertaken in Merseyside, South Yorkshire and Tyneside suggest that the supplements could add 50% to sales.

The target readership is working class with a heavy bias to younger people and to the north. With this kind of income group, the paper cannot be as reliant as a quality paper on advertising. *NoS* hopes, however, firstly that many of the local authorities which have invested £3.7m in the paper will use it for recruitment advertising, and secondly that the heat set 16 page colour insert magazine will pull in consumer advertising.

Perhaps the paper's greatest problem will be to satisfy the high and often conflicting expectations a divided Left is placing on the project. There is a danger that for activists the paper will be disappointingly superficial and for a mass audience too worthy and self referring. Finding a coherent voice that conveys serious issues in an entertaining but unpatronising way will be crucial.

The Left is about to have a new Sunday newspaper

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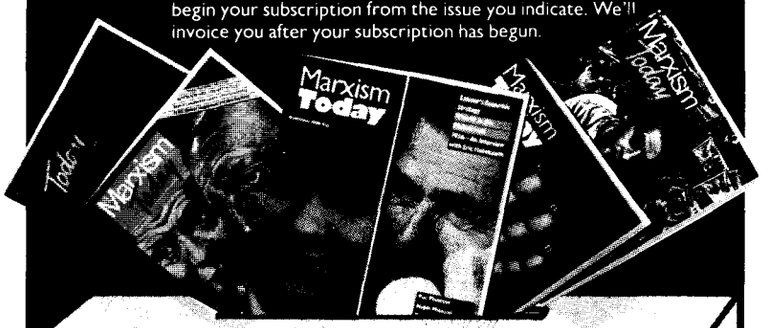

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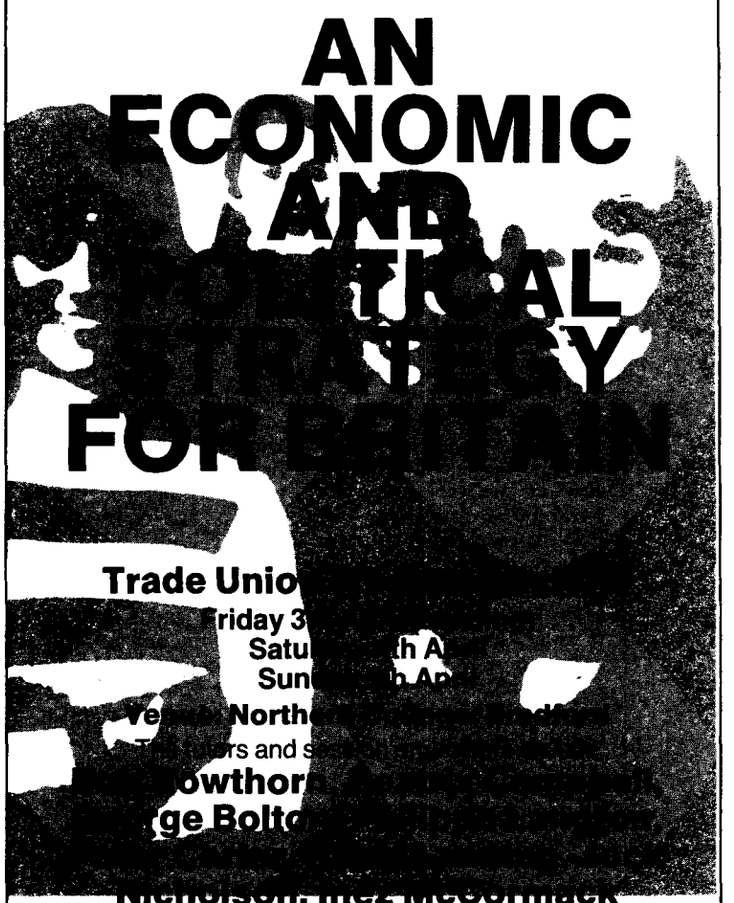

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The Pilger episode was undoubtedly a short-term public relations disaster and was as much about personalities as principles, but the paper's senior executives now look back on it as a therapeutic debate that was badly needed before rather than after the launch. That the debate was necessary is not surprising. There is no recent tradition of radical popular newspapers in Britain and the paper is having to make one up. It was inevitable that there would be discussion of the ingredients that had made the *Sun* such a success. But to characterise Sutton's admiration of the tabloid technique as a threat to the politics of the paper is misconceived. The *Wapping Post* which he edited with distinction lacked neither politics nor flair.

The row had another significance. It also showed that the paper's structures were capable of resolving differences speedily. The paper aims to be democratically run, but with an eye to deadlines. Kevin Mousley, the paper's press officer, stresses 'the editor will edit. He will not be run by committee'.

The paper's constitution is nevertheless complex. It has a founder's trust similar to that at *The Guardian*, which prevents any single interest taking over the paper (the most likely predator would be Maxwell).

Regional reader groups are also being set up in 12 cities with a full time co-ordinator, Tony Cook, a former broadcaster whose job is to develop the committees into the paper's eyes and ears. The committees will have formal elected structures, and the intention is that pressure groups such as CND, Greenpeace, trade unions and minority groups, will give the paper a wider editorial base than just the 56 journalists, currently being selected from over 1,300 applications.

All that's needed now is 800,000 readers to show that you don't need a PhD or a £50,000 mortgage before a newspaper will take you seriously. ●

Patrick Wintour

100 Flowers Wilt

The student unrest which has dominated recent news from China, and which has now led to the downfall of the Communist Party's general secretary Hu Yaobang, was the largest popular demonstration by students for a decade. This time the unrest did not start in Beijing, but in a number of provincial capitals, including Hefei in Annui province, and Kunming in the south-western province of Yunnan. Only when the demonstrations broke out in Shanghai did the Chinese media begin to report them. As they died down in Shanghai, so they flared up in Beijing and other cities in north and east China.

So often with student protest in China, the initial spark is something quite minor, such as complaints about canteen food or about the university syllabus, and this time was no exception. But issues of national importance became the object of debate. In Hefei, the students specifically addressed themselves to the way that people are elected to local government. The regulations on local elections, which were drawn up in 1979, were not being adhered to, and instead suitable candidates were simply being appointed by the party at each local level.

But the local issues soon took on a wider context as the students began to call for democracy and freedom. It is still not absolutely clear what they mean by this. Many of the students stated they still supported Deng Xiaoping and his reformers, and wanted more freedom of debate within a one-party system, but others made a more dangerous demand – a multi-party system.

Who was behind the demonstrations? It can be argued that both the conservative and reformist elements would have something to gain and something to lose by inciting the students. But it seems reasonable to assume that the students themselves started the movement, probably with support from some university academics who want the academic field in China to have greater intellectual freedom. We know that Fang Lizhi, the vice-president of Hefei University of Science and Technology, where the trouble all started, has advocated that the universities should be independent of political constraints. He has also made the much more dangerous assertion that democracy is something which the people obtain through struggle, and not something which is bestowed upon the people by the leadership. Fang Lizhi has now been expelled from the Communist Party, having become, with others, a target of attack following a hardening of the party leadership's attitude.

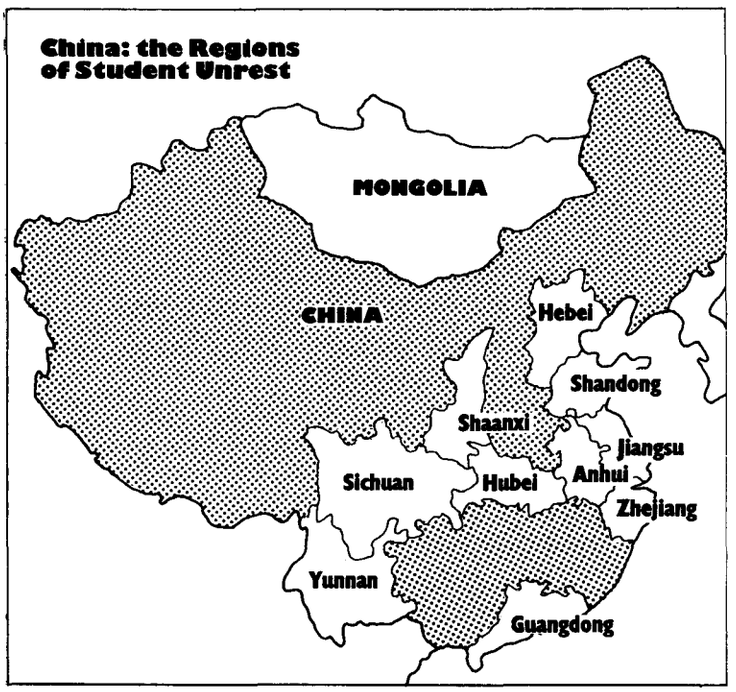
Towards the end of December, Deng Xiaoping decided that the protests had gone far enough, and issued a warning to local officials to toughen their attitude towards the students.

That hardening has now culminated in the resignation of general secretary Hu Yaobang. That Mr Hu, for 40 years a friend and protege of Deng Xiaoping, should fall victim to the fears that liberalism had gone too far in China is a sign of the deep seriousness with which Deng must view the developments of the past weeks.

The fall of one of the supporters of greater liberalism will confirm the worst fears of those, both inside and outside China, who wondered how long it would be before there was a reaction to the increasing outspokenness of many people in intellectual and cultural circles within the country. The present situation leaves Deng Xiaoping in a dilemma of his own creation. He is still committed to a path of economic reform, but has been forced to placate his conservative critics on the question of ideological freedom which they felt to be moving too far and too fast. To this end, he has had to sacrifice his old colleague Hu Yaobang and others who symbolised the increasing liberalism.

But China will never be able to progress economically if the intellectual straitjacket is not loosened as well. The resignation of Hu Yaobang will indicate to everyone in China that once again the brief period of 'One Hundred Flowers Blooming' has come to an end. ●

Elizabeth Wright.



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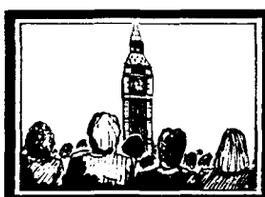

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LETTERS

Sid's Campaign

Charlie Leadbeater's article 'The Sid in us all' (*MT*, Jan), though I disagree with much of it, is both thoughtful and intriguing.

He is right to regard privatisations as a misrepresentation of the 'popular capitalism' they were designed to promote. They have created, by the generous pricing of share issues, expectations, on the part of those to whom they have introduced direct share-ownership, that are wholly inappropriate.

New investors have been introduced not to capitalism, but to a form of speculation – stripping the discount from their shares by the immediate sale of their allocations.

But cheap privatisation issues are not the only contemporary sign of movement towards popular capitalism. There is also a growing interest in owning shares in the company for which one works, which I, were I a member of the Left, would be much more concerned about.

The trouble with state-ownership is that, contrary to Leadbeater's assertion, there are no sound economic arguments for it. Inefficiency is endemic in state-owned organisations, as it is in all other monopolies. A major government stake on the supply side of the economy is, and always has been, a recipe for serious misallocation.

The misallocation is best regarded as a substantial agency cost of egalitarianism. There are much more efficient ways of promoting equality, through the tax system for example.

The fact that privatisation has done precious little to improve efficiency is because of the subordination by government of competition to budgetary need. BT and BGC would have attracted much less investment support had their sales been accompanied by vigorous attempts to promote competition. As Leadbeater suggests, competition offers the best protection against monopolistic exploitation.

This is why Leadbeater's novel suggestion that utilities might be organised on a franchise basis is so interesting. Periodic competitive tendering for franchises, tantamount to establishing a market in the corporate control of utilities, would not offer consumers the protection of full competition, but it would be far better than nothing.

But Leadbeater seriously weakens his argument by proposing that government should retain 80% of the regional companies. This would destroy completely the effect of competitive tendering. The proposal demonstrates how profoundly the Left has misunderstood the significance of ownership.

State ownership and control, by removing competitive discipline, *always* imposes unnecessary agency costs on consumers. The pursuit of the egalitarian goal through state ownership is a costly confusion of the 'allocative' with the 'distributive' role of government.

Competitive tendering for *all* regional utility franchises is an allocative idea worthy of further study. It would have distributive implications – through the conversion of the agency costs of state ownership into lower prices and higher tax revenues – but should not incorporate any distributive features such as the retention of state control. ●

Tom Lloyd,
Editor and co-owner
Financial Weekly

Terrorism

Fred Halliday, terrorist or freedom fighter? Why is it that *MT*'s only major reference to Palestine for some time is a rather cryptic photo-caption attached to an article on 'terrorism' (Jan *MT*).

I cannot see how Fred's rather glib and highly Eurocentric treatment of the problems faced by liberation movements has taken the Left forward.

Fred makes the dubious comparison of what is official Israeli policy, ie, the indiscriminate bombing of Palestinian refugee camps, with what 'some Palestinians' may do to Israeli citiziens in reprisal. The PLO and Fatah do not condone the indiscriminate killing of innocent Israeli citizens, or the bombing and hijacking of civilian planes, so why imply otherwise?

I suppose the magazine's editors had the good taste to remove some of Fred's other 'tips' for the PLO made at the Left Unlimited event. Is it too much to ask for a right of reply for the PLO? ●

Paul Hassan, London

Fashionable Left

We'd been looking forward to *Marxism Today* running an article on fashion. At last, we'd see the plurality of people's fashion, as well as political, lives.

Instead we were treated to a snide prescriptive piece which pretended to be about fashion and the Left (*MT* Jan) but was acually about what straight, white men (preferably from London) are wearing. Why did the editor choose to focus on this least stylish 'minority', omitting not only women but the particular contributions of black people, lesbians and gays to radical fashion?

Women have always taken clothes more seriously, and recognised that they do say something. That's why it was feminists, such as Elizabeth Wilson and others, who began to develop theories around fashion, and women designers like Katherine Hamnett who started the current wave of 'political clothing'. And it's not just designers who've been influential. Street fashion has become increasingly important. Young women in Doc Martens and leggings are the inheritors of feminism's earlier 'comfortable' fashion style. And they're having fun dressing like this too!

When we look at the new 'fashionable' man, he is in fact made up of the styles which were developed by the 'outlaws' of the Left, particularly by black men and gays. Why couldn't this have been acknowledged and explored? ●

Janie Glen and
Sioned Mair Richards

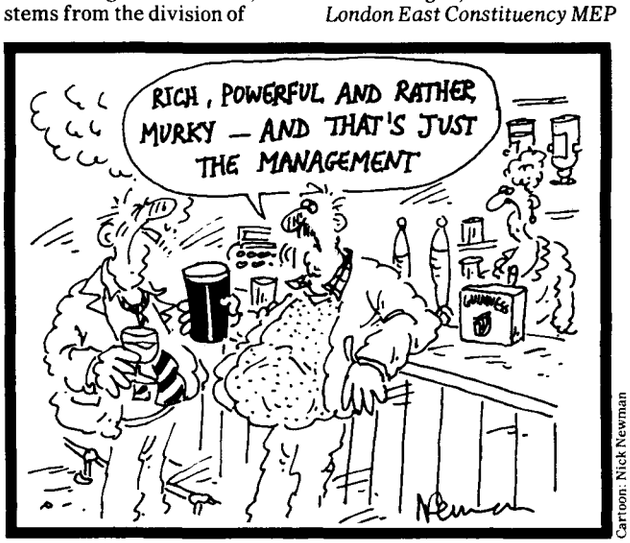
European Women

Catherine Hoskyns' article on the scope and limits of EC equality legislation (*MT*, Jan) made refreshing reading. Access for the British Left to such valuable information and excellent analysis is long overdue. Selective reading of the Treaty of Rome and a myopic view of the EC in the past by a male-dominated labour movement has not helped. One serious result of this is that EC equal opportunities laws have not been exploited by, or on behalf of, women as they should have been.

Catherine is right to underline the gap which exists between the women's movement and Brussels civil servants responsible for framing equality laws. Such a gap also exists for Euro MPs (even those on the women's rights committee) and stems from the division of power between EC institutions. Euro MPs have to really coax and cajole on the sidelines in an unsatisfactory *ad hoc* manner using debates in Strasbourg, the occasional committee meeting, or informal lunches, to get their point across.

Labour women must have more access to EC information. Meeting women from other countries is also essential. The distance between an obscure political process and the real struggles of women has to be bridged, as does the distance between European women themselves. The European Parliament must be used to provide facilities for European women to meet, as the peace movement has done in the past. Euro MPs can, and must, continue to give a helping hand in this crucial venture. ●

Carole Tongue,
London East Constituency MEP



Cartoon: Nick Newman

PS

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Press Association

Maureen McGoldrick, whose hounding by Brent allowed a victory for Thatcherism.

Labour's Left Councils

Charge Of The Light Brigade

Brent became a *cause célèbre*. Maureen McGoldrick became a martyr. It all went wrong for the Left. **Beatrix Campbell** asks what has gone wrong with new municipal socialism

Equal opportunities and local democracy is what the women's movement, the black movement, the politics of disablement have given to their political allies on the new Left in the town halls; the municipal Left reciprocated, their gift was to make the administration of local government accessible to a cultural revolution. The alliance around radical labourism has changed the contours of local and national politics, it set the new left agenda of the 1980s. For the first time, movements which lived their life outside the state and political parties found themselves moving in the same orbit.

But what is missing? The traditional institutions of labourism within civil society, primarily the trade union movement, have often innured themselves from this process. The Labour Party itself has been the instrumental agency within the state, but has been inert or absent within civil society. It is not a mobilising party, it has not shared the new political conversation with its constituents.

Nor was the Labour Party particularly engaged, as a party, with the new politics in the process of renewal. Regeneration has hardly been understood, if at all, by many of Labour's parliamentary front bench, and not much more by Labour's parliamentary Left. Not surprisingly, they don't know how to defend the cultural revolution taking place in the town halls.

Thatcherism's first phase operated on the contradictions within the old forms of postwar social democracy, gathering around the Right all the pessimism and disappointments with 'public' provision and indeed with politics itself. But in its current phase, Thatcherism has proved to be breathtakingly resilient in attacking the new form of egalitarian social democracy, its outreach into the economy, its sexual politics and its anti-racism which are its novel features.

The government lost round one of its education contest against the teaching unions – over pay – only to bounce back by winning round two against Brent council – *in alliance with the teachers.*

The Brent debacle synchronised vital manoeuvres for Thatcherism: the attack on the local state, equality in general and black people in particular. The sub-text is socialism itself; within Thatcherism, *Left = loony.*

In the wake of the assault on the so-called 'loony Left', it is culpably complacent to dismiss the project inaugurated by Stuart Hall and *Marxism Today* of theorising Thatcherism's 'fearful assault', as a preoccupation only with 'the squalid, depressing and ordinary Tory administration it has now become' (Helena Catt and Patrick Dunleavy *New Socialist* January 1987).

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Thatcherism is squalid and depressing, for sure, but what it isn't is ordinary. And in any case none of that's really the point; the point is that it keeps winning.

The thesis was never only about Thatcherism itself, but about its meaning for the Left, it's 'not just a problem for the Left, but of the Left'[1]; Thatcherism has targeted our territory and means to take it.

In some cities, particularly in the south, the new alliances described above have transformed the profile of Labour in power. In three local authorities – all of them in London – we now have black council leaders, and in Brent there is a new generation of councillors who enjoyed a landslide victory on a radical manifesto; the 'class of 1986' include more women and more black people than ever before, who have lived their lives in their communities' politics rather than in the Labour Party as such. Brent is probably the most representative council in the country.

But they have been thrown into public calumny in defence of their anti-racist programme by an unprecedented coalition; the government, the teaching unions and some right-wingers on Labour's front bench. Besieged and isolated, who knows the price of their pain and exhaustion? Relatively inexperienced, certainly courageous, perhaps a bit careless, it has fallen to councillors like these to defend a subtle political project against the simplifications of Tory common sense.

Why is left local government so vulnerable to the holy war on the 'loony Left', and why is the municipal socialist project, flavour of the month between 1983-85, and certainly one of the most creative features of modern labourism, now in crisis?

Part of the problem is parliamentarians' indifference to what Sheffield's David Blunkett describes as the necessary 'partnership between socialist government and local government'. The locality may not be where all social contradictions are manifest, but it is where the people *live with* the Labour Party. Labour's survival as an *important and useful party* among the people depends on its ability to become *important and useful* to the people; that means making local government nothing less than a model of democracy, efficiency and equality if Labour is to repair most people's experience of political powerlessness.

But the crisis is deeper than parliamentary indifference; the problem is, in part, that in the labourist tradition, the local state has replaced the political party within civil society as the agency of regeneration.

That makes labourism vulnerable to the anti-statist sting within Thatcherism. Without the infrastructure in the organisations making up civil society – from parent teacher associations to trade unions, from play groups to chambers of commerce – to wrap around its political challenge, then Labour cannot protect that challenge against a crusading political enemy whose success is that it has articulated most people's despair with politics and in particular the state.

Let's be more concrete and look at some of Tebbit's targets. There's Militant in Liverpool – still being defended by some of the Labour Left despite its authoritarian, racist and sexist record. Militant in Liverpool is a model of trotskyist statism which finds a niche in Labour's own traditions. Militant's policies have echoed old-fashioned godfatherism on the one hand, and conservative workerism on the other. Machine politics plus economism = Militant. It has tried to destroy the infrastructure of the city's civil society – for instance the voluntary sector, the housing co-op movement and the Black Caucus network. It should be noted, too, that when the party's national executive moved against Militant in Liverpool, it relied on administrative measures rather than on regenerating the party. The reservoir of political opposition remains outside the party, but securely grounded in the life of the city. It now comprises a popular alliance between the Black Caucus, which co-ordinates the many voluntary organisations among black citizens, the women's organisations, the housing co-ops movement disowned by the city council, the voluntary sector which has been starved of resources by the Labour council, and the trades council.[2]

Liverpool is an example *in extremis* of the problem of statism in Labour's local government. But it in no way shares in the experiments of the new municipal socialism. On the contrary it attacks their very roots. It is these new policies, and the councils that espouse them, that have now become the main target for Thatcherism, with little or no protection we might add from the Labour front bench. Moreover, these councils have sometimes set themselves brave objectives.

In impoverished Hackney, for example, ethnic minorities comprise 44% of the population, of whom 33% are black. When Hackney adopted its equal opportunities policy in 1979, together with two or three other London boroughs, only about 10% of its workforce were from ethnic minorities, and among senior officers the proportion was only 3%. Today 33% of its manual and non-manual workers are from ethnic minorities. The initiative did not come from the trade unions, some of which have been less than co-operative.

Then there's Lambeth, also one of the poorest patches of Britain, where one of their most remarkable and honourable achievements is that the council has integrated disabled workers into their workforce and exceeded the statutory 3% quota when most employers have yet to honour the minimum. And quite properly they are trying to make the staff profile match the population, over a third of which is black. Lambeth and Hackney (loonies, remember) were among the first councils to take on their own discriminatory employment practices at the end of the 1970s.

'For the first time movements which lived their life outside the state and political parties found themselves moving in the same orbit'

In theory, many of our local authorities are behaving contrary to our sex and race discrimination laws. Most *don't know who they employ* because they won't find out – fewer than a handful of local councils have properly monitored their workforce to find out if they were discriminating against women and blacks, which of course they were, and then done something about it. But where is the challenge to the rest? The bad practice of Tory authorities ought to have made them the target of a progressive, co-ordinated offensive. But there is none. It isn't coming from the Labour front bench. It isn't coming from the trade union movement. There is still not yet a national challenge to the endemic racism and sexism which populates the hierarchies of local government, Tory and Labour, with white men.

Having said that, the citizens of the radical boroughs are still faced with a contradiction; heroic councillors ready to go to prison over ratecapping still preside over boroughs where basic services don't work. You still can't get your repairs done. In the case of Lambeth, you can't get your housing benefit for months, maybe years. In the case of Hackney, half its directorate has disappeared during the course of an inquiry into freemasonry, corruption and inefficiency by barrister Andrew Arden. The town hall staff union Nalgo has boycotted the inquiry for over a year.

There's a disease in this poor little borough called the Hackney syndrome; it means not getting things done. And it's not helped by an unholy alliance, which often operates informally in these places, between extravagant political promises which excite expectations, reluctant rightwing bureaucrats (as against nice, enthusiastic bureaucrats, who do exist, too) and conservative trade union consciousness, which comes in the macho trotskyist, stalinist or labourist varieties.

We're talking about poor places and poor people here – for whom the council may be the most important agency in their lives. And yet they're places where service delivery is bad for people who deserve the best. Rhetoric minus management = a mess.

Part of progressive councils' problem is they are often challenging discriminatory traditions in which the trade unions are themselves implicated. A protagonist involved in the GLC (where the unions resisted the equal opportunities programme) mused bitterly, 'what breaks my heart is the trade unions. They don't take industrial action in the Tory boroughs like they do in the left boroughs. None of the equal opportunities initiatives have come from the

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unions. Sometimes it's used as a source of aggravation between unions, or it's used in collective bargaining, not because they want it, but because they know we want it.'

(To be fair, others have taken it on board with some enthusiasm – girls get apprenticed these days in the direct labour organisations of several local authorities, usually where left Labour or Communist shop stewards have taken the initiative. The point is, however, that rarely does the initiative either nationally or locally come from where it should, the trade unions.)

'In the labourist tradition the local state has replaced the political party within civil society as the agency of re-generation'

At worst this becomes a degenerate wrangle between a conservative trade union consciousness, and a radical socialist consciousness, in which the real issues are buried in a struggle not for hegemony – cultural and political leadership – but for control. This is exactly what has happened in the London borough of Brent, where the majority of the children in schools are black, but only 10% of their teachers share their ethnic origin, and therefore their experience, their history and their culture. Brent's staff shortage is also so acute that in many schools children are already, in effect, part-time pupils.

When the council commissioned an academic study of black children's 'failure' in the school system, the National Union of Teachers in the borough refused to give them access to the schools. They said they hadn't been consulted. As it happens, the union is part of a regular consultative machinery with the council. But in any case, was that a good enough reason to withold their co-operation? And why didn't they take the initiative in the first place?

Maureen McGoldrick was the headmistress of Sudbury infant school, where 80% of the children are black, and less than 25% of the teachers are black. As we know, she was accused by an officer of opposing a new black teacher to fill one of several vacancies because she was black. The officer, quite properly, reported the problem to a senior officer. McGoldrick was then suspended, which may not have been quite proper, but either way any equal opportunities employer would have had to take some action.

The union's response was to encourage McGoldrick's denial, and to take legal action to stop the council carrying through its inquiry, which would have investigated not only McGoldrick's alleged remarks, but the source of any resistance to the employment of more black teachers at McGoldrick's school. What seems to have happened was that the white-dominated governors didn't want any more black teachers and McGoldrick – accused by no one, not even the council actually, of being racist – buckled to their pressure.

One of the most important sources of opposition to Brent's anti-racist strategy has been the Brent Teachers' Association (part of the National Union of Teachers), which has, for many years since the days of former Communist Max Morris, been led by the so-called Broad Left. While supporting member McGoldrick, it failed to support a black probationary teacher's right to a job, has consistently opposed the black NUT members' self-organisation in the borough, and is still refusing to sign the borough's equal opportunities code.

The role of the NUT was instrumental and a model of conservative trade union consciousness. What was the union defending? Firstly, the power, not of ordinary members, but of head teachers. Second, the power of whites. Thirdly, tradition. It thus threw itself into a vortex, unaware of its unconscious motivations. For where can it *go* with such a strategy? Where it did go, actually, was into an unprecedented coalition with Thatcherism – Brent was where the Tory cabinet, the NUT and elements of Labour's front bench (without talking to their comrades in Brent first-hand) came together.

A local dispute became a national drama. The stakes were suddenly very high. Some local Labour leaders shrug it off, saying 'we'll still win in Brent'. Probably true. But that ignores the national dimension – Brent lost the argument. And the effect was to give a new respectability to racism, and a new notoriety to anti-racism.

That happened because the drama was lived out not as the council's campaign to get more black teachers into its schools, but over its right to hire and fire. The real issue is that the teachers' unions, central government and until recently the council have not taken responsibility for the plain fact that the schools fail black children and the system fails to deliver black teachers.

Witch-hunted Brent council *appeared* to be hunting down a nice lady who nobody thought was racist. The fatal factor was that an individual, rather than a structure, was the target. Brent appeared to be defending only its own prerogatives and procedures, rather than the community's rights. That was partly a problem of public relations, but it was more than that; the council was trapped in what used to be known in the communist movement as using an administrative method to deal with a political problem. Besieged in their bunker, councillors have felt the disciplinary hearing had to be kept separate from their anti-racist strategy. One was a matter of procedure, the other a matter of politics. So the council appeared to be defending their own right to hire and fire, when they were defending their perfectly sound anti-racist policy.

One of Brent's biggest assets is its leader, Merle Amory, a fundamentally *nice* woman, for years hounded by the media and no doubt haunted by the scale of hardship facing her constituents. Unusually for someone who would have got a parliamentary seat if she'd sought one, she's chosen to stick with ordinary people and extraordinary problems. She was away during the worst of the crisis. But not even she could get out of the proceduralism in which the council was imprisoned.

Amidst the alchemy of bureaucratic procedure Brent *appeared* to be policing people rather than protecting either people or a policy. What should have been a consciousness-raising and learning process degenerated into a wrangle over authority and discipline.

The web connecting civil society and the state was so fragile that Brent council was left terribly exposed; the infrastructure within civil society to sustain anti-racism had not been secured. The school governing bodies, no less than the NUT, have not been promoting anti-racism, and yet you can't win with an equal opportunities strategy in schools unless the pressures bearing down on schools want it. If white middle-class heads and white middle-class parents run the governing bodies, then the council's anti-racist strategy is doomed. That white dominance was in part the effect of previous political appointments made by Labour.

Now let's turn to Haringey. Indifference to the problem of consciousness and of civil society found this London borough embroiled in a battle over sexual orientation in sex education which does not even enjoy the support of all the Labour group. This is probably the first time that black socialist councillors have agreed with rightwing white Tories.

No doubt thinking it was doing the right thing, the council employed a lesbian and gay unit which earlier this year sent out a brusque letter to school heads. As one veteran of lesbian and gay politics in local government put it, 'heads aren't in the habit of being told what to do. That's not how you handle teachers'. Furthermore, 'nobody had deemed it necessary to tell parents what they were doing'.

Lesbian and gay politics are for sure the most vulnerable; where there is a popular, if inchoate, mandate for equal opportunities, it is clear that there is sadly no equivalent mandate for positive images of homosexuality, nor even perhaps for minimal civil rights for gay citizens. The panic over Aids has legitimised rampant homophobia. Gay rights need sophisticated political protection.

But in the absence of any public work within civil society, statism has replaced consciousness-raising.

The gay movement has lived its whole life having to come out, build alliances, change consciousness, create its own culture and carve out emotional and physical space for pleasure and for its own survival. Unlike the heterosexual world, it has always had to keep its own secrets and yet defend its desires. If the gay movement has learned anything, it is that you must know yourself

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and your enemies, for they are everywhere. If we are to protect the gay and lesbian initiative we have to find some shared sexual language with exactly those people who in some other moment may be our enemies.

None of this experience seems to have informed the bravado of some of the front-line councils. As one councillor who has campaigned for gay policies put it, 'the gay issue has been dragged in by well-intentioned councillors who think it is the same as sexism and racism, when it's not, without realising the forces ranged against it'.

This is not to argue for retreat, but it is an argument for a strategy! And that means a network of alliances and conversations to diffuse its truths within the culture. A gay councillor puts it like this, 'no one is making a clear argument. We've got to talk it through carefully. As long as you have a strategy it doesn't matter how long it takes, because it will have a truth of its own. What we've got to worry about is how to help people convince themselves. We can't guilt trip people any more'.

From these various examples, we can conclude that, in the absence of any public discourse, the new anti-racist and anti-sexist policies are not being defended; policy-formulation in the town halls has not been shared with the communities they represent. Instead a new language is being thrown around as a stick to beat people with, militant moralism is replacing pluralism, solidarity and consciousness-raising. This is compounded by the way in which the new politics have been hijacked by a kind of ultra-leftism.

'A new language is being thrown around as a stick to beat people with, militant moralism is replacing pluralism, solidarity and consciousness raising'

In the name of accountability, one of the benchmarks of Bennite democratic reform, local parties often seem to exist only to police their councillors rather than activating their communities. 'These days put a foot wrong and wham, your toes are off. It's not very comradely', complained an old hand in both the gay movement and southern municipal socialism. 'No one is immune. One minute a shining knight, the next minute', as one northern Labour council leader put it, 'the chalice is knocked out of your hand.'

Thatcherism's attack succeeds exactly in this maelstrom, where administrative methods are used in the name of a new politics; the problem arises where administrations use the power of the town hall to short-circuit the toil of creating a new consciousness.

The demise of the GLC has exposed the ragged state of the Labour Party as a party. In London the GLC seemed to replace the party. 'The very success of the GLC seemed to reduce the party to a state of terminal idleness', says one councillor. In many other cities it is the same, but for different reasons, particularly in the north. In many, perhaps most cities, there is *no* Labour Party functioning as a *party* in civil society. If Labour's strength (compared with little parties and big movements) is that it understands the machinery of power, then its weakness (compared with little parties and big movements) is that it doesn't seem sensitive to the movements of consciousness. It doesn't mobilise, and it doesn't inhabit civil society.

Labour has been using the state to effect transformations without transforming itself. Often you get the impression that it doesn't see that kind of work as important. Labour didn't create black consciousness, the gay movement, feminism or peace politics, but now it borrows their work. These movements have changed some of the political agenda, and perhaps increasingly there is a symbiotic relationship between the party, these movements and the state.

But while engaging with the party, many activists in these movements have discovered that in adopting their demands Labour has not adopted their culture. We've got to learn how to share that culture with the Labour Party, but the Labour Party has to learn how to be more than a political manager, it has to learn how to be a political *party*. ●

1 *The Politics of Thatcherism*, introduction, ed Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques.
2 For an exhaustive account of the black movement's challenge to the council see *The Racial Politics of Militant in Liverpool: the black community's struggle for participation in local politics 1980-86*, by Liverpool Black Caucus, published by the Runnymede Trust, 1986.

SHEFFIELD

Planning for Jobs

This month Sheffield City Council launches **"Working it Out"** – a new discussion document, outlining the framework for Sheffield's jobs and training needs over the next two years and into the 1990's.

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The Gorbachev Revolution

Innovation has replaced inertia. Secrecy has given way to a new openness. The crisis in Soviet society looks at long last as if it is out in the open and being confronted. But how far will this democratisation process go? In this interview by Monty Johnstone (below), **Fedor Burlatsky**, a close aide to Gorbachev and political commentator on *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the highly influential Soviet weekly, suggests it might be a long way

What political significance do you attach to the permission given to Sakharov to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky?
I regard it as an indication of the new stage we have reached in the process of democratisation.

Does this reflect a change in the Soviet government's attitude to 'dissidents'?
The position of Sakharov is not the same as that of dissidents generally. Sakharov has performed valuable services for the Soviet Union in the past as a scientist.

But some other 'dissidents' have already been released. Will this be extended to all those imprisoned or exiled for their political activities?
It depends on them. They will be given a chance to define their attitude to the democratic changes now taking place in our country and some will come back to play their part in society, I think.

Would you like to say more about these changes in your political system underway since April 1985 under Gorbachev's leadership?
We have come increasingly to understand that the government's reforms can only go forward with deep changes in our political system. In recent speeches, especially in Stavropol and Krasnodar, Gorbachev emphasised that democratisation is the precondition for real economic changes and development. What kind of democratisation can we speak of? This is a big and profound process of which we are only at the beginning. But there are already interesting changes in many spheres. First of all the problem which we call, in Russian, *glasnost*.

Openness, freedom and accessibility of information.
Yes, and this involves a new role for public opinion, influencing the policy-makers and the political process as a whole, and affecting all political decisions. It's not just a one-way process from top to bottom. It's also a question of collective farms, factories and co-operatives influencing the top leadership of our (Communist) party as well as the regional party organisations and Soviets.

Can you give examples of some of the things that are happening?
I would mention the big changes in the activities of our writers and film-makers, as well as in our mass media. Recently were published such novels as *Sad Detective* by Astafyev, *The Fire* by Rasputin, and *The Execution Place* by Aitmatov. These are very interesting novels because they deal with problems like alcoholism, crime and drugs, which weren't dealt with before. Now there are big discussions about them with different views expressed. There's a lot of controversy around Aitmatov's novel, which discusses problems of morality and religion in an unusual way. Many people have criticised him, but he's responded, especially in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and the debate contines.

There are also some very interesting developments in the cinema. About 10 films which had been held up by the authorities – in some cases for years – have now been released, and everyone can see them. I was particularly interested in the film *Repentance* made by the Georgian director Abuladze about the Beria period . . .

You call it the Beria period rather than the Stalin period?
It is especially about Beria, who was in charge of the security organs and who had led the party in Georgia; that's why I mention Beria. But this of course was during the Stalin period. It is concerned with Beria, his violence, and his arresting and ruining people. The film raises a very sharp problem, and shocked some bureaucrats.

Can you show where public opinion has changed political decisions?
Yes. The central committee of our party took a decision about diverting rivers in Siberia. The issue was taken up by many famous writers, especially Zalygin, Astafyev and Rasputin, both before and at the writers' congress last year. Now the decision has been revoked.

This suggests a signigicant change in the position and activity of organisations like the writers' union.
Yes. This new role being played by social institutions like the writers' and film makers' unions is another symptom of the process of democratisation. During last year's congress of film makers there was something like a mini-revolution. They changed all the leaders of their union. They elected Elem Klimov as their first secretary, the director of a famous film, maybe you know it – *Agony* – about Rusputin and our last Tsar, Nicholas II – which wasn't shown for eight years. Something similar occurred during the congress of writers when they elected a new first secretary, Vladimir Karpov, a very interesting man who fought in the second world war and was a Hero of the Soviet Union. At both congresses there were free elections and very interesting discussions with differing views, not only about art and culture, but also about social and especially ecological problems.

The economic reforms present another aspect of the democratisation process. We have begun to make big

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economic changes, not to replace the socialist system, but rather structural reform – decentralisation, where there will be new possibilities for factories to have so-called self-management and self-financing. We have begun to democratise the economic sphere. We call it democracy at the economic level. This means, first of all, a real role for traditional organisations, such as the party organisations, the trade unions and the youth organisations, but maybe there will also be some new institutions.

Workers' councils?
I don't know exactly what it will be because a new statement is still being prepared about factories and co-operatives, and other economic institutions . . .

A central committee statement?
It will be prepared as a special law, and I think there will be some new insitutions. Everybody must have the feeling that they're an owner of the factory, and that their activity will be paid well with money, with goods, and with moral incentives.

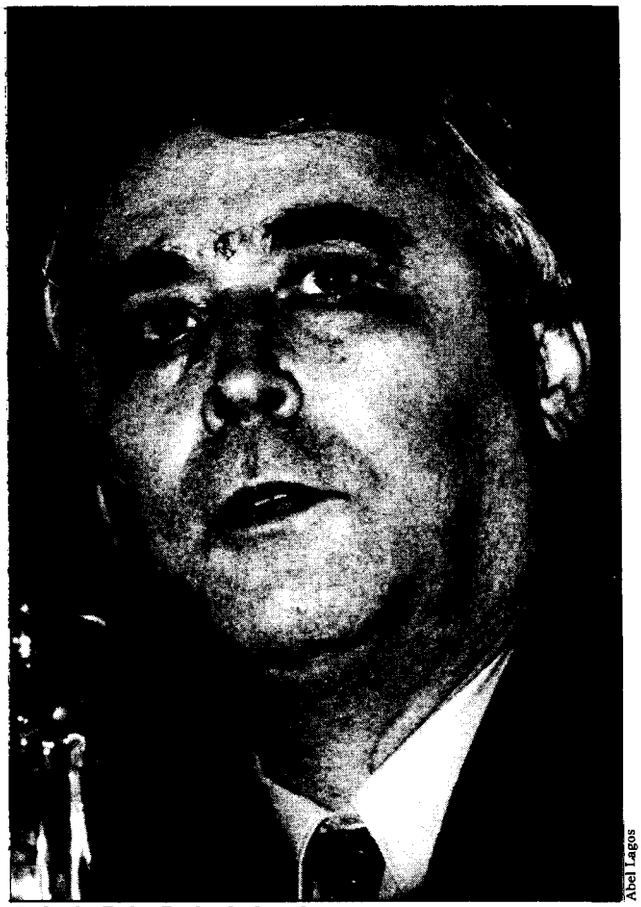
How will this broadening of responsibility be reconciled with the role of the director and the system of one-man management?
There will be some new model. My own opinion is that we must find some model in which the strategy in the factory – concerning economic and social policy, conditions for the workers, their money – will be decided by the whole collective. But at the same time the executives, the administration – not one person, but a group administration, a group of directors – will have good possibilities for initiative, for decision-making in the everyday process.

But would these directors be appointed from above, by the ministries, as in the past, or chosen by the workers as in Yugoslavia, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968?
You know, it is a big problem because there are different views in our country, and the experiences in Yugoslavia, for example, or in Hungary or Czechoslovakia have been different. I spoke recently with representatives from Yugoslavia and they are not so satisfied. They have their own problems – the problem of bureaucracy, the problem of the differentiation between the more developed and less developed areas, and the problem of unemployment. Therefore we must be careful. We must research the experience of different countries, including Hungary, Yugoslavia, and now China – I wrote an article, maybe you know, about the economic reforms in China – and find our own direction. Therefore it is difficult to answer your question. Perhaps there will be new management bodies on which the workers will be represented, or maybe other institutional forms. We're discussing these problems at the moment.

And what about the question of the electoral system? I notice that in Gorbachev's report at the 27th congress he talked about the need for changes. Now will this mean, for instance, the possibility of having more than one candidate?
This is a very interesting question. During my work on the magazine *Kommunist* from 1953-1960, I published many articles about the development of democracy. And I made the proposal at that time, 30 years ago, that we must do something of this kind – to have maybe a list of candidates, or two candidates for one place, maybe not in all regions, maybe not at all levels, but there must be more real possibilities for choice. But many specialists objected and mentioned technical problems. For example, who will agitate for one person, who for another person, and in what form – because they represent the same bloc, the 'bloc of communists and non-party people'. But I believe we will find a new way – especially at the local level. It is simple there because people know everybody, they know the candidates, they know not only their political platform, but their personal possibilities, their views, their activities, their morality. And then maybe we'll go from the local level to the republic level, and then maybe to the highest level, to the Supreme Soviet. I believe there will be big changes.

Do you see considerable resistance to this and the other changes from bureaucratic forces?
Yes, but we should be clear what the various sources of resistance to change actually are. The first is traditional thinking and conservative traditions. This is a psychological question for everybody – from the simple worker or peasant to government people and the secretary of the party. That's why Gorbachev said that 'restructuring' must first take place in our psychology. We must change ourselves – we must change our own methods. The leadership especially must understand that they will work more effectively in the new atmosphere, with openness, with the influence of public opinion, with democracy. Secondly, many people in the apparatus, especially in the state apparatus, are afraid because they will lose some power, and give new possibilities to the factories, to the co-operatives, to the regions.

And the final source of resistance is the problem of interest and privileges. Again, that too is a big problem for many people. You must understand that it is not only the apparatus, but also ordinary people who are not prepared for radical changes. We must not have illusions about the workers and peasants. There is an active part of them who want to work better, and get more money, more goods, and more appliances, and maybe their own homes, and dachas, but there are also many people who don't want to work harder. I believe that our hopes for the reforms and the process of democratisation are first of all based on the political will of our leadership, in the first instance Gorbachev, because only a very deep and strong political will can sustain such structural changes.


Abel Lagos

A play by Fedor Burlatsky based on an imaginary conversation between two party secretaries was shown on Soviet tv in December and caused a sensation for its outspokenness

After Stalin's death this kind of process began to be carried through with Khrushchev at the 20th congress in 1956, and it continued at the 22nd congress in 1961. But then it came to an end with the removal of Khruschev and his replacement by Brezhnev, and for a long period of time a certain reaction took place – not taking things back to the Stalin period, but nonetheless slowing down and in some respects reversing this process of democratisation. How do you account for this? And how will you make sure that the same thing doesn't happen again?
After the 20th congress there were very big changes. We changed our laws and court procedures. But the traditional thinking, the political culture of the population and possibly the interests of some social groups were such that it was impossible to carry through such deep reforms as now. I can say that there were objective reasons, and subjective reasons. First of all the objective reasons – the traditions and the conservative thinking in the apparatus and in the population. And the subjective reasons were the new leadership that took over after Khruschev.

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I don't want to mention the new leader's name, but you know who I mean. He was maybe a conservative leader, not a bad man, but a conservative leader, who didn't believe in change.

And as he became older he believed even less in change.

Yes. And when Andropov came to power, he began a new style, a new method of rule in the party and the whole society, and that is even more true with Gorbachev . . .

Some of us didn't understand why after Andropov, with whom things had begun to change, we should have had Chernenko, with whom things seemed to stop changing.

Yes. It's a lucky story how Gorbachev came to power. Maybe it is the best opportunity for the Soviet Union, for new thinking and for international policy.

'It is traditional in Russia . . . that the reform must be supported first of all from our leadership. This is the case now'

But how to ensure that the same resistances don't lead after some years to a reversal also in the present reform process?

Yes. You know I personally am an optimist – a biological optimist – I have believed in reform for maybe 35 years. I have written in this way in all my works and my articles for a long time. And I believe that now we will not go back, because the problems are so urgent and so sharp. Public opinion understands the big scale of our problems, and now we have a new society, a more educated society, and we have new cadres, cultured cadres. It is not the same as after Stalin's time. And last but not least, the political will of our leadership. It is traditional in Russia, you know, that the reform must be supported first of all from our leadership. This is the case now.

You mentioned the debates and developments in the film makers' and writers' unions. Do you think that we shall see in the future similar debates in the Supreme Soviet, and at party congresses and so on, as opposed to the unanimity on the principal questions that we've seen so far?

This process began at the last congress, the 27th congress. If you examine carefully the different speeches, you will see differences . . .

But only differences of emphasis.

For example, Yeltsin and others were more progressive, more radical than . . .

Kunaev for instance.

Yes, maybe it did not take place so openly, but we understood everything. You see this was the first step. And we will have the same in the soviets. I believe that the sessions at the soviets will be longer than now. Not two or three days as now, but enough time for a proper debate, for big discussions, for explanations, for different views and alternative proposals. And this process is beginning now at the regional level. But it will go further during the next period.

Gorbachev's New Broom

March 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev elected as general secretary of Soviet Communist Party.
April: Gorbachev in report to Communist central committee exposes 'unfavourable trends' in the economy.
From May: Campaigns develop against alcoholism and corruption. Important changes in government and Communist Party leadership.
Oct: Draft of more realistic Communist Party programme issued for nationwide discussion.
Jan/Feb 1986: Press features many critical contributions, including attacks on privilege in Communist Party, in the party's pre-congress discussion.
Feb/March: 27th congress of Soviet Communist Party meets. Unanimously adopts new party programme, rules and economic guidelines. New central committee elected with many new members. Gorbachev's report stresses need for 'radical reform' of economy.
April: Chernobyl nuclear disaster.
June: Government plan for diverting Siberian rivers attacked as ecologically unsound at Soviet writers' congress.
Aug: Government drops Siberian river diversion plan.
Summer and Autumn: Gorbachev, on visits to Soviet regions, makes increasingly hard-hitting speeches stressing need for 'democratisation'.
Nov: Supreme Soviet adopts law legalising limited private enterprise in service sector.
Dec: *Pravda* criticises Brezhnev's leadership (1964-82) for 'lack of consistent democracy and openness'. Dinmukhamed Kunaev, closely associated with Brezhnev, replaced as first secretary of Kazakhstan Communist Party by Gennady Kolbin, a Russian supporter of Gorbachev's reform policies. Subsequent rioting in Kazakh capital, Alma-Ata, reported in Soviet press *Literaturnaya Gazeta* publishes a report of Supreme Court conference envisaging reform of legal system to protect citizens' rights. Widespread 'gross violations of the law' exposed. Academician Sakharov allowed unconditionally to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky. Some other 'dissidents' freed from prisons and labour camps.
Jan 1987: All Soviet industry goes over to new system of material incentives and self-financing.

So you envisage that in the future there will be debates on the issues of public concern with different points of view being represented in the press, in the Supreme Soviet . . .?

Yes. In our press, radio and tv, very serious problems are now discussed, not only by professional journalists, but by writers, by scientists and by ordinary people in their letters with different proposals and criticisms. This is something new – a new role for public opinion. And the same, I believe, will happen at the sessions of the soviets, of trade unions, of youth organisations and especially in the party.

What about on an issue such as nuclear energy after Chernobyl? Can you foresee a controversial debate taking place on the extent to which they should continue to develop nuclear power stations, with some people arguing, as over here, that nuclear power should be phased out?

You know this is a very painful question because Chernobyl concerned the fate of many people and therefore there is no open discussion about this tragedy. But as you know our central committee and government gave the public an explanation of this event and took a very firm decision to guarantee that it will not be repeated elsewhere. But at the informal level there are different views, especially among the scientists and the writers, and there are views something like those of the greens in Western countries. Some writers argue that we should not place nuclear power stations near towns or rivers but instead maybe in Siberia or in other places where it wouldn't be so dangerous. You can see this mentioned in some speeches and articles, especially by the writers. But, I repeat, Chernobyl is a very painful question. Therefore there are not such big and open discussions about it.

Do you think they will develop in the future?

Maybe not specifically about Chernobyl, but about the general question of nuclear power, yes. I believe we will discuss this problem openly because we must compare different views, especially the views of our scientists and our writers who research this problem, and the views of the population who are afraid of such tragedies.

Would you envisage the possibility, for instance, of groups of citizens who were taking a position similar to the greens being allowed to organise and express their point of view within the framework of a more pluralistic society?

It is not usual for our society.

But will it be in the future, do you think?

I don't know. Because such kinds of activities are not in our tradition.

Well, in the early years of Soviet power, at

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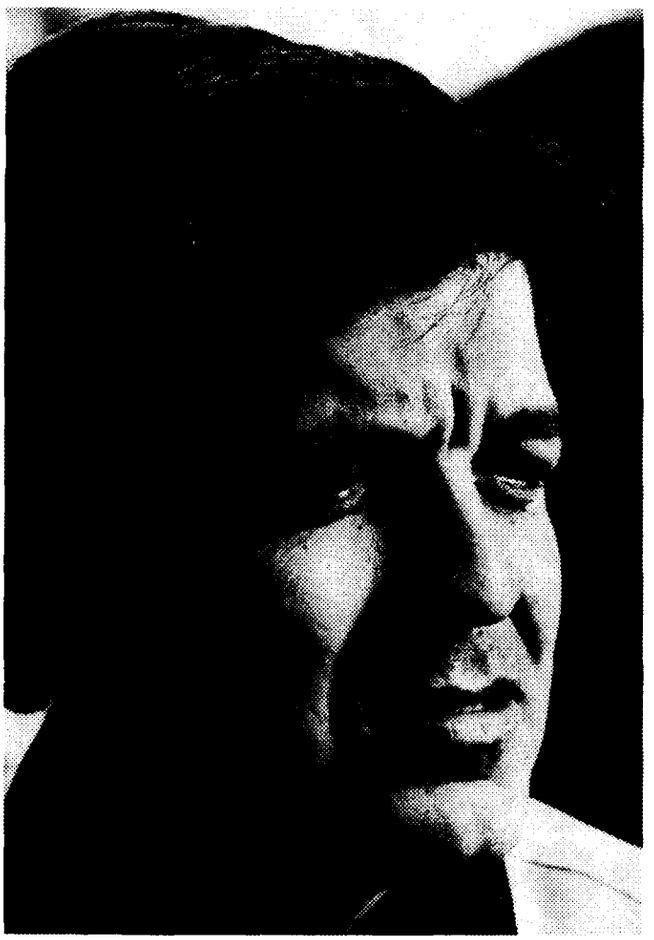

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the time of Lenin, you had different political parties contesting, as you will remember very well.
Yes, but for 65 years or so we have had no such experience. Maybe it will not take place this way, but there will be something like open discussion in the mass media, in the party and trade union conferences.

Could you envisage the possibility, in a particular area, of an election in which one of the candidates stood on a platform of opposition to nuclear power stations being constructed, for instance, in that area?
You know, it is impossible to forecast such concrete things.

But in general terms would you see a development towards what we would call political pluralism, a socialist pluralism?
This is not such a simple question because the term 'pluralism' is not used in socialist countries, because we have for a long time criticised Western writers who attacked us especially from this point of view. But I remember one speech by Andropov when he said that if you explain 'pluralism' as different views, different alternatives, then it is a usual thing for our society. In public opinion, and in the apparatus, when they prepare something for the leadership, there are different views, and they compare different possibilities. This process will go on, but it will be deeper. But it does not mean that there will be opposition to the party or to socialist society. We mean some pluralistic views on a socialist basis.

Would you see, within this framework, the possibility of a women's movement developing in which the specific aspirations of women and feminist ideas could also express themselves?
Yes. New women's bodies have been introduced.

The women's councils?
Yes. This is very important, especially because our women take part in the social process, in the economy, on the same footing as men as you know. And they have the same education. Maybe we have more women than male doctors. But on the political level maybe there will be some changes. You know that we now have a secretary of the central committee of our party, Biryukova, and this is the first step to some changes. There are many women in the Supreme Soviet – I don't remember exactly how many, maybe 30% of the deputies. But I don't remember, have we women ministers?

No.
Maybe not. There must be some changes in this respect, and generally in the political influence of women. I think there will be big changes.

And how do these women's councils actually operate? What are their responsibilities? What do they do and how widespread are they now?

'Still today there is only one political figure – Lenin – and nobody else. They don't write about Stalin, about Khruschev, about Brezhnev, about Andropov, maybe about Chernenko'

Brenda Prince/Format
Kiev: the past looms large

You know these are only first steps. Women have some new problems. What kind of problems? They must find out for themselves. In my opinion, first of all, it is a question of improving social possibilities for women, because usually they work more than men, in the offices, the factories and the co-operatives, and then at home. And we must change the role of men in the families. That is a big question. So is the question of services. Our service sector is very bad now. It must be changed. And women are more interested in this question than men – the problem of good restaurants, of obtaining good products without having to stand in queues – the general social problems. And, as I mentioned before their political role. Maybe there's also the problem of women's independence, about which there are big discussions in our mass media. The traditional family, with the man at the head of the family, has broken down because men and women have legal equality and the same money. Their economic role in the family has changed. What should be the new model of relationships? New technological developments have given everyone new possibilities, and have changed many social institutions, and perhaps especially the family. What there will be after this I don't know. But I see the process. We can research it.

Along with the current changes that you have described, is there now likely to be a more, shall we say, objective appraisal of the Stalin period in the Soviet Union? For instance, 50 years after the first of the Moscow trials in which Zinoviev and Kamenev were condemned to death, and 49 years after the trial in which Bukharin and other Communist leaders were sentenced, we have still had no reappraisal of these trials.
The magazine *Druzhba Narodov* recently announced a new novel by Antoly Rybakov, *Children of the Arbat*, about a very tragic page of our history, Kirov's death.[1] I believe it will be published. It will be a sensation, because it will be the first step in dealing with the problems of the 30s, the problems of the so-called cult of the individual with broken democracy and the arrest of many people, you know . . .

Yes, I certainly do.
But what about the other political figures? That's a big question. Because still today in our history there is only one political figure – Lenin – and nobody else. They don't write about Stalin, about Khruschev, about Brezhnev, about Andropov, maybe about Chernenko . . . And at the conference of teachers of marxism-leninism, Gorbachev and Ligachev mentioned that we must change our style of teaching the history of our party. It is now without personalities. And they must research the role of all political leaders, of leading members of the politburo, and explain what happened during Lenin's time, during Stalin's time, and after Stalin's time, dealing with every figure. It is our duty. But I can't answer now about the personalities you mentioned because it is a big question, and it is a difficult question, and maybe we'll have an answer in the not too distant future.

Turning to the most recent period, how do you assess the riots in Alma-Ata in December when Dinmukhamed Kunaev was replaced as first secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan by Gennady Kolbin, a Russian?
I believe that it was right to replace Kunaev, who was not a good person for the job, by Kolbin who is a good person for it. The students who rioted misunderstood the situation. There were elements of tribalism[2] that had been fostered by the corruption that had existed in Kazakhstan.

Were there not also elements of nationalism?
Tribalism rather than nationalism, I think.

It is suggested by the Western media that the postponement of the central committee meeting fixed for December to discuss 'cadres' policy (personnel questions) indicates opposition to Gorbachev's policies from other Communist leaders. Would you like to comment?
I have no comment because I am not informed. But the postponement may be a result of difficulties in deciding what changes to propose regarding the replacement of older leaders by younger ones, rather than as a result of opposition. The problem is a very complicated one. ●

1 The murder of Kirov in December 1934 served as Stalin's pretext for launching mass repression in the Soviet Union.
2 The term 'tribalism' has been used in the Soviet press to denote the existence in Kazakhstan of what we might term mafia (ethnic and family) networks.

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Unions: Fit For Active Service?

Labour's industrial plans depend on a new role for the unions. But **Tony Lane** argues that the unions just aren't up to it

It is surprising how little attention has been paid to Labour's new industrial policy considering the old ideas involving a centralised economy and a powerful state have been dropped. The new proposals offer a decentralised, democratised industrial structure where legal ownerships stay unchanged, but where workers and others would be able to intervene in strategic decision-making.

The Labour Party's most recent industrial policy paper says: 'The planning frameworks of the centralised Eastern European economies have little relevance to the British context. Detailed control over production, investment and pricing is not feasible, or even desirable, in a highly complex mixed economy. We need to open up key decision-making to those most affected, employees as well as management, regions as well as central government.'

In the detail there are plans to rebuild the tripartite sector working parties of NEDC, to turn some of them into bargaining-planning forums and then to support development programmes with capital investment and training and education facilities. At the level of the company and the region the plans are vaguer, but there are the same aims of encouraging the extension of collective bargaining into matters of corporate planning and the same intentions of providing expertise, training and educational support.[1]

These innovative policies for democratising economic life plainly see the unions playing a major part, and herein lie the snags. The unions have never been geared up for much more than fire-fighting and given the rather primitive nature of their machinery it is extremely unlikely that they could smoothly and rapidly adjust to take on the sort of forward-looking role envisaged for them.

The unions have been accustomed to thinking of industrial strategy in terms of nationalisation, regional investment and employment incentives, representation on economic development councils and the like. These policies placed few demands upon them for all they had to do was sort out the politics of who to nominate to bodies that had only consultative functions. Trade unionists neither participated, nor expected to participate, in bargaining with companies over such matters as R&D priorities and budgets, product development and marketing, re-equipment and relocation, senior appointments and management training.

Labour's intention, however, is to bring precisely these sorts of issues within the scope of collective bargaining as a means of opening up the 'secrets' of economic life, releasing talent left dormant and so transform the performance of British industry.

Labour's problem in all of this is not so much trade union reluctance as trade union organisational competence. What is wholly missing in any of the policy papers is any evidence that Labour is aware of just how backward trade union organisation is – and any awareness within the unions of what these policies would require of them.

Perhaps the Labour Party might be forgiven for its ignorance about the unions. On the one hand very few Labour politicians have had any recent or deep experience of trade unionism. And on the other hand, their chances of getting very much *in*direct experience have been limited by the paucity of studies of trade union administration and government. The Donovan Commission chose to largely ignore these matters and it has been left to newspaper labour correspondents to provide what little illumination there is.

In a generally sympathetic study of British unions, Robert Taylor has said in his *The Fifth Estate*: 'Union critics like to portray the unions as overmighty subjects, highly disciplined monoliths. Nothing could be further from the truth. In manpower and financial resources, the British unions are ill-equipped to provide their members with an adequate back-up service. Behind the often impressive facade of union head office, there is often little more than an empty shell.' (p27) This is an embarrassingly accurate observation.

So basic is most trade union office management and information handling that it would be a rare office at local, regional or national level which could provide any sort of profile of its members in the private sector. And if it could do it for the public sector the chances are that it would be using management data. Generally speaking, trade unions simply do not analyse their memberships by industrial sector or by firm and then by such basic things as age, gender, wage rates, payment systems, hours worked, etc. Lack of information of this sort may be taken as symptomatic of what is a normal state of organisation – and which is in the most striking contrast with what is normal in the larger companies.

Private sector trade union membership is concentrated in large national or international firms whose operations are often spread over a multiplicity of interlocking branches. A good example of just how complex these corporate forms can be is given in the Bullock Report: 'Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds Ltd (GKN) [has] a "four-tier board structure" encompassing 143 boards in the UK and 583 directors. At the top is the holding company board of GKN (UK) Ltd; below these are 13 sub-group boards in the United Kindom, and below those, 137 United Kingdom company and division boards'. (p65)

The everyday and long-range functioning of such firms requires bureaux responsible for the continuous monitoring of each branch and subsidiary as well as the broad social, economic and political environment. Monitoring on this scale is not a job for amateurs, and that is why so many trained librarians and archivists work in private industry. The really large firms have extensive intelligence units employing economists as well as information handling personnel.

Other companies can draw on a wide range of small firms who specialise in producing and selling economic and political intelligence. While unions have, on a number of occasions, used consultancy services, this has not been a common practice. In-house, no British union has the resources to engage in intelligence analysis on a scale in any way comparable to that of the larger firms.

As *between* unions the rate of exchange of economic intelligence is almost zero. It might be surprising to the outsider beguiled by the use of the term 'trade union *movement*' but there is no sense in which it is possible to talk of a community of trade union resear-

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chers. They may be few in number, but these cadres have no natural arena for meeting, no formal machinery for exchanges and talk of a common data base would bring ceilings down with ribald, cynical and incredulous laughter.

The TUC's research department is mainly concerned with macro-economic overviews and briefings for the specialist sub-committees of the general council. Ruskin's Trade Union Research Unit is a consultancy which works to contract on specific projects, and the independent Labour Research Department operates on a shoestring as a digestor and disseminator of publicly available economic information.

Matters are typically a good deal worse in the districts than in head offices while at workplace level it is rare for shop stewards or branch officers to continuously monitor performance, changes in plant production and so on. Written records are either never kept or kept only for a particular period for a specific end-purpose. It is unheard of for trade unionists to routinely produce parallel sets of records or hold and analyse such management records as are freely available. Taking things in the round it would be extremely difficult for any part of the trade union movement to respond quickly and efficiently to a request for detailed information about a particular industrial sector or company.

In these circumstances alone, it is legitimate to wonder how effective the unions could be in negotiating with practiced senior managers, supported by sophisticated research teams.

Unfortunately, poorly supported intelligence functions are not the only aspects of union organisation that should cause concern. There is the additional and familiar problem of a mis-match between union and industrial structure. If overlapping jurisdictions present far fewer problems than they did 20 years ago, they still make it awesomely difficult to sustain permanent inter-union organisations even in one company.

Attempts by workplace activists, over five decades, to form combine committees to overcome the maladaption of formal union structure to oligopolistic industry have gone through regular cycles of collapse and revival in the face of hostility from full-time officers and lay committees. If there are now signs of declining official antagonism, there are as yet no recorded instances of actively promoted and funded joint-union committees. The most recent survey of combine committees concludes that they still lead a precarious, hand-to-mouth existence.[2]

The problems produced by the lack of efficient joint-union organisation are compounded by the inadequacies of government and administration within individual unions. The typical structure is rigidly on a centre-region-branch basis and was designed to hold unions together rather than to allow for traffic between different sections of the membership; in some cases union structure has been designed and still operates precisely to *prevent* horizontal communications. Horizontal contacts between full-time officers in different regions but with responsibility for the same firms are as informal and *ad hoc* as they are between convenors and senior shop stewards. There are some companies who unwittingly provide a forum for full-time officers and senior shop stewards when they provide an annual presentation of the firm's prospects and performance.

The underlying cause of unions' organisational weaknesses is that they have not normally and as a matter of habit concerned themselves with the logic of the enterprise. Regardless of their politics, trade unionists have habitually *responded* to managerial initiatives and tacitly accepted enterprise planning as the legitimate sphere of management.

In the workplace this has shown itself in an unconcern with the organisation of production, unless it has affected health and safety, the ability to earn, redundancy and so on. Isolated instances apart, it is not common for workers or their representatives to express concern about what is produced, where and how until crisis has loomed. The price paid for the lack of strategic foresight has been the unions' inability to have any impact whatsoever on the drastic surgery imposed on British industry during the last decade. It is a pity, therefore, that while Labour's new proposals provide a belated acknowledgement of past short-sightedness, still missing is any appraisal of the competence of labour's own institutions.

Looking at Labour's aims, it is easy to imagine well-disposed civil servants advising ministers that their proposals could not be widely implemented in less than 10 years. The trade unions would themselves need urgently and dramatically to realign their jurisdictions and simultaneously transform their organisations. While they were doing this, they would need to absorb the consequences of amendments to company law which allowed trade unions access to information permitting the extension of collective bargaining to include corporate planning.

The government, meanwhile, would be waiting to see national and regional planning colleges established to train managers and workers, and deciding how best to ensure that trade unionists in the regions and districts would be able to obtain and digest reliable and high quality economic intelligence. An attempt to do all this on a wide scale, and at a suitable level of local density so that resources and services were equally available, is simply not feasible in the life of one parliament.

Labour would, accordingly, do well to present policies as experiments, scale them down and concentrate resources in designated regions and industries. Amendments to company law on information disclosure and the *right* to collective bargaining are plainly fundamental. These new rights could not, however, be effectively operable without resources from central government to provide capital investment, training and education and intelligence facilities. By restricting the resources available to particular regions and industrial sectors, the whole project could be set up on an experimental basis.

This might also prove to be a politically intelligent ploy: it would give the unions a chance to move at an acceptable pace, provide the time to encourage public interest and awareness and not least to placate managements whose initial reactions would certainly be hostile. ●

Planning For Full Employment

Extracts from the Labour Party's industrial planning document (1985):

We need a programme to plan key industries, sector by sector, and sometimes firm by firm, which draws on the strength of collective bargaining with trade union organisation. Co-operation between industry, unions and government at national, regional and local levels is crucial.

We need new rights for trade unionists to have a say in company decisions, and to receive information about company policy and plans.

We must have closer involvement of people with local community and shopfloor knowledge and experience, not only with the process of formulating economic and industrial policy, but also with the implementation and monitoring of those policies.

Integrated investment packages would be offered to those firms willing to negotiate a planning and employment agreement between government, unions and management.

In order to play an active and informed part, shop stewards' committees would need their own research and financial advisers.

'What is wholly missing is any evidence that Labour is aware of just how backward trade union organisation is'

This article is a revised and condensed version of an article which first appeared in *The Industrial Relations Journal* Vol 17 No 4 winter 1986.

1 The most important papers are: *Economic Planning and Industrial Democracy* TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee 1982; *Planning for Full Employment* Labour Party 1985.

2 Michael Terry 'Combine Committees: developments of the 1970s', *British Journal of Industrial Relations* Vol 23 1985.

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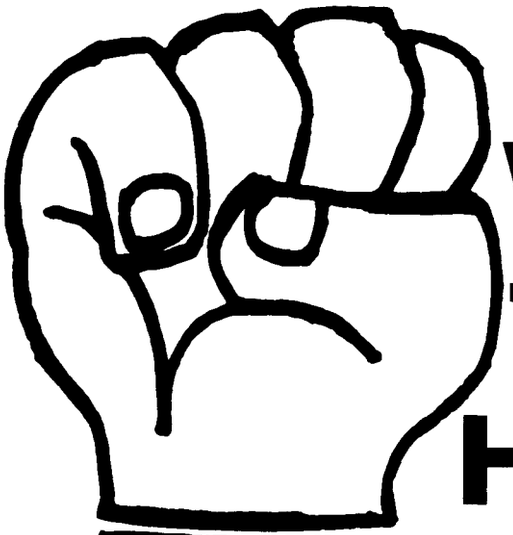

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Labour Shores Up Its Defence

The Tories have staged a powerful recovery in the opinion polls and defence has been the pivotal issue. As in 1983, Labour remains vulnerable on defence. **Jon Bloomfield** asks whether Labour can make its non-nuclear policy stick with the millions of people it needs at the next election

On December 10, the Labour Party published its official defence policy. Its declared intention 'to cancel Trident, decommission Polaris and remove all American nuclear weapons in this country' marks a sharp break from the cross-party consensus of the postwar decades. It is already a focus of much public debate and will continue to be so.

In contrast to the last general election Labour has begun to get its act together. It now has a leader who argues the non-nuclear case with competence as well as conviction and Kinnock leads a party which has broadly united around its policy. The charge of 'defenceless' so effectively exploited by the Tories in 1983 has been countered by a hefty, if ill-considered, commitment to extensive conventional defence spending. Thus Labour enters the election period less exposed and vulnerable than before.

However there are no grounds for complacency. The last half of 1986 saw a marked revival in the electoral fortunes of the Thatcher government. A set of factors were involved here and some may prove temporary. Yet there seems no doubt that the defence issue was very prominent amongst them. The main surge followed the Liberal conference rejection of the Alliance's 'Euro-bomb' proposal. The accumulation of support continued more slowly through the autumn as the Tories and national press savaged Labour's non-nuclear defence policy, officially confirmed at its Blackpool conference. Apart from one December Gallup poll this assault has not significantly eroded Labour's recorded level of support, which remains stuck in the upper 30% range. However, all the indicators suggest that potential Labour voters have considerable doubts about this policy. These are the citizens whose support is necessary to secure a majority Labour government.

In the run-up to an election this situation is a cause of grave concern for the Labour Party, the Left and the peace movement. The extent to which it is overcome will not only improve Labour's prospects of being elected but also its ability to implement the non-nuclear policy when in office. The scale of domestic and international resistance to the policy means that its full implementation will require a political and not merely a parliamentary majority. The fact that every survey of opinion bar one has shown a sizeable majority opposed to unilateral nuclear disarmament indicates the scale of the problem.

The nuclear disarmament issue presents a contradictory picture. Public concern over nuclear weapons is widespread. The 1980s have seen enormous social movements spring up in many parts of Western Europe giving voice to this concern. In Britain on particular issues, most notably Cruise and Trident, there has been very strong and at times majority opposition to the government. Deep alarm was aroused last April by the air raid on Libya launched by US F1-11s based in Britain. Mrs Thatcher's authorisation of this action left her relatively isolated, with even sections of her own cabinet opposed.

Despite this when the issue moves into the *political* arena the support for non-nuclear policies falters. This problem cannot be satisfactorily explained by emphasising Labour's disunity and incompetence at the last general election or by its present shortcomings. There is something deeper here and it is a European phenomenon. In Belgium, Holland and West Germany powerful peace movements have failed to sway the majority of their electorates. In Spain, last year's referendum gave support to the pro-Nato stance of the Gonzales government. In Britain, with its long imperial history, it is even harder to shift public opinion in this area.

Anxieties about an accelerating arms race and the actions of the Reagan administration coexist with other concerns and fears in the minds of many citizens. Conservative politicians understand this well. They transform the issue from the specific weapons systems into the question of deterrence, and 'defending the country'. This strikes a deep chord in the emotions and psychology of millions of people, partly arising from the historical experience of the start of the second world war and partly because on defence more than most issues, if a government gets it wrong the consequences can be catastrophic. On defence, the whole adds up to a lot more than the sum of the parts. The bulk of the Left and the peace movement fail to acknowledge these sentiments or appreciate their tenacious roots.

To raise these problems is not to suggest that Labour should duck the issue. A U-turn on its policy now would undermine Neil Kinnock's credibility and make Labour a laughing stock with the electorate. But there is a more substantial case for pressing ahead. The accelerating arms race is the most dangerous feature of international relations. Superpower negotiations are the central but not the sole means of halting and reversing this situation. In an increasingly multi-polar world Western Europe has its own autonomous contribution to make. As a nuclear-armed power Britain has a specific responsibility. Initiatives taken by a progressive British government – some unilateral, others bilateral or jointly with our European partners – can help to unblock the log-jam and develop an impetus for disarmament. This is not to exaggerate the role of any potential British government, merely to affirm that there is room for action.

Yet for this process to start Labour has to win the election. To do so it must overcome the doubts of many voters. That requires a comprehensive de-

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Who rules the waves: British ex-servicemen protest at a CND demo in October 1985

fence and disarmament policy, which Labour is finding hard to construct. This partly arises because the very movement which has forced the issue into the public arena is unable to conceive of the strategy which can win a political majority. In seeking to do this Labour and the broader Left have to challenge the shortcomings found within the peace movement.

Labour has moved on the area where it found itself most vulnerable at the last election – that of defence itself. Both the recent policy document, *The Power to Defend Our Country* and Denzil Davies, the shadow defence minister, have made it clear that all the savings from the cancellation of Trident will go on strengthening conventional forces. For the first few years in office Labour has indicated that there will be no reduction in the current record defence expenditure. Their policy has a simple, direct logic to it, namely that Britain has to make a choice between conventional or nuclear weaponry for it can't afford both. This is one answer to the structural crisis facing Britain's defence expenditure which, as Labour correctly points out, the Tories refuse to confront. Whether this will protect Labour's achilles heel with the electorate is hard to judge but it would be unwise to underestimate its potential appeal.

Military matters are alien territory to the British Left and the peace movement. Unlike in West Germany where the SPD have discussed defence and military policy extensively and a former general, Gerd Bastian, is a prominent Green, in Britain there has been little apart from the work of the Alternative Defence Commission. By culture and temperament most of the Left including this writer are either indifferent or often antagonistic to these issues. The semi-pacifist trend in the peace movement reinforces these sentiments, which also find an echo in the labour movement. Thus it is not surprising there have been few substantial alternatives presented on conventional defence policy.

Many on the Left recognise that it is politically unrealistic to think that the transfer to a non-nuclear policy can be simultaneously accompanied by sharp cuts in defence spending. Yet there is much unease arising from the style, presentation and content of the policy. Simply stated, Labour has gone over the top on conventional defence. The attack on Mrs Thatcher for being weak on defence is crass and the promises on military spending are foolhardy. The pressures on any incoming Labour chancellor and the imminent general defence review are grounds for caution. Further, the policy is silent on the prospects of serious negotiations with the USSR for conventional force reductions in Europe, which would create favourable conditions for significant cuts in arms spending. This perspec-

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Sheila Gray/Format

Labour's defence policy: a hefty commitment to conventional defence

'Military matters are alien territory to the British Left and the peace movement'

tive is lacking in Labour's proposals. In consequence the distinction between an effective military policy for national defence and a militarist policy is not clearly drawn.

Previously, a major drawback in the mass appeal of a unilateralist policy has been its insularity. The charge of 'Little Englandism' stuck to the policy. This was reinforced from two quarters: one, the Left's traditional antipathy to Europe; the other, the elevation of unilateralism, by many in the peace movement, from a tactic to a principle.

The weakness of this isolationism has become more apparent with the developments of the last two decades. Since the early 1960s Britain's world role has altered and its power and status qualitatively diminished. The huge growth in the nuclear stockpiles of the two major powers has reduced the global significance of the British bomb. The old unilateralist policies have to be adapted to the new circumstances where the East-West relationship is the key to reversing the arms race. In consequence the potential impact of British unilateral nuclear disarmament is lessened and a broader disarmament policy assumes greater importance, one which addresses the East-West conflict and the European dimension within it.

Both the Labour Party and the peace movement have been slow to change in response to these developments. Within the peace movement, END has tried to give a broader perspective with mixed results. The false dichotomy with multilateralism persists and the radical proposals of the Gorbachev leadership have been met with suspicion, often because of their multilateralist character. Aware of the political importance of international support for its policy, Labour however has made more progress. Apart from Kinnock's US trip, he has cultivated Labour's contacts with the Socialist International and reached some limited agreements with the German SPD.

However, this is painfully inadequate. In the medium-term Labour needs to come to terms fully with Europe. More immediately it should do two things to broaden its policy. Firstly, it should give more prominence to the central issues of the East-West conflict and the bilateral and multilateral initiatives required to start a process of disarmament. This could be done quite easily. On Star Wars, nuclear testing, the 'Freeze' and the Reykjavik summit, Labour's voice is muted. It is frequently outshone by the Alliance. The historical legacy of the unilateral/multilateral divide is hampering Labour's capacity to present a comprehensive disarmament policy. It requires both the Left and the peace movement to bury the hatchet and say that on many issues this cleavage is anachronistic. Bilateral and multilateral negotiations are essential to reverse the arms race and Labour must make it clear that it will encourage and contribute to that process.

Secondly, Labour could give impetus and substance to its bilateral commitment by arranging a visit to Moscow in the near future. The Gorbachev leadership has made a significant impact on Western public opinion, bringing the hope of improved East-West relations. Labour should key into this mood and indicate that it is the party which can 'do business' with Gorbachev. Two years ago Kinnock and Healey reached a bilateral disarmament agreement with Chernenko. With careful planning and prior consultation this could be revised and extended. For example, since Mrs Thatcher quickly scotched Reagan's backing for the 'zero-zero' option outlined at the Reykjavik summit, Labour has scope for some diplomatic freelancing on its own account. In return for the removal of Cruise, it could ask the USSR to dismantle the equivalent proportion of SS-20s. Here is the opening for Denis Healey to use his extensive expertise and skills to secure an agreement prior to an election. This would be a practical expression of Labour's bilateralism and would illustrate both Labour's determination for disarmament and its hard-headedness in pursuit of it.

Labour's third task is to indicate the process and timing of the non-nuclear policy it proposes. This it has begun to do. Yet to convince the electorate and because the obstacles it will face as a government are so formidable, it needs a clear sense of its tactics and strategy.

The policy has three distinctive elements: the end of Britain's own nuclear weaponry; the removal of the most recent addition to Nato's nuclear arsenal, Cruise missiles; and an end to the long-standing nuclear elements of Nato's capability in Britain, the US nuclear bases and bombers.

Britain's own bomb should be top of the agenda. Here the key policy decision, to cancel Trident, has Alliance as well as Labour support and some sections of the military too. The international ramifications of cancellation would be slight, an important factor since a Labour government will certainly be facing balance of payments difficulties and be in need of financial assistance from other governments.

Stronger opposition would confront the decommissioning of Polaris. The entire SDP and the parliamentary Liberal Party would side with the Tories, while public support for the policy is weaker than on Trident.

Labour was exposed on Polaris at the last election and some analysts, relying on opinion poll data, believe they will be again. However, events have moved on since 1983. Powerful trends are running Labour's way. Militarily, Polaris is seen as a rusting asset. Economically, the country's precipitate decline makes a mockery of its pretensions to nuclear status. Politically, the reality of Britain's decline has sunk in. Hanging on to the bomb is increasingly seen as a delusion of grandeur. Labour can make the running here and it should. Ironically, Britain's decline has given greater public credibility to unilateral action on Britain's bomb.

Second on the agenda should be the cancellation of the next batch of Cruise missiles due at Molesworth in 1988 and the removal of those stationed at Greenham Common. Politically, this is Labour's strongest ground on which to move against American nuclear weapons. Cruise missiles have been the subject of sustained political debate and support for Labour's policy extends well beyond its current electoral base. At Reykjavik the American government indicated its willingness to negotiate them away, thereby spotlighting their dispensability. Their removal will reverse a decision of the last government, not breach a postwar bi-partisan consensus.

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However, this policy will encounter fierce resistance, both domestically and internationally. Notwithstanding Reykjavik, the US government will stoutly challenge any unilateral removal of Cruise. It will also be firmly resisted by the four other deployment countries, Belgium, Holland, Italy and West Germany, whose governments not least will fear the power of example. Furthermore, they will want to avoid a military as well as political domino effect, for missiles removed from Britain could be relocated by Nato on their soil. If Labour had concluded a bilateral arrangement with the USSR whereby they would remove an equivalent proportion of SS-20s, this concern could be eased. Such an arrangement would also help to sway undecided domestic opinion.

By far the greatest difficulties come with the third stage of the policy, shifting the US/Nato bases and bombers out of Britain. Britain's decline makes getting rid of our own bomb easier while simultaneously making unilateral actions within the Nato alliance much harder. This is all the more true when the policy challenges a long-established feature of political and military life initiated by the Attlee government.

The harsh reality of Britain's geo-

'A major drawback in the mass appeal of a unilateralist policy has been its insularity and isolationism'

ilitary position makes the unravelling of our nuclear connections all the more hazardous. The 135 American bases and installations in Britain are central to Nato's military strategy. Even the removal of the handful of nuclear-equipped bases is enormously significant, for it would cause major logistical and operational problems, disrupting central features of Nato's strategy and planning. This explains the vociferous hostility which this aspect of the policy has encountered from the US above all others, and it would be mistaken to presume that a Democratic president would view the policy in a more positive light. If the policy were carried out, heavy pressure would be exerted on other European Nato countries to take the displaced US facilities. This adds a military dimension to the already existing political hostility which the policy encounters among West European governments.

Not only will international opposition be at its fiercest: domestic support will be at its weakest. The flurry of action at US bases after the Libyan raid should not obscure the fact that there has been negligible campaigning against US bases in England for more than two decades. Here it is important to distinguish between a vague anti-Americanism which is quite widespread and a firm opposition to the bases of which there is little sign.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that Labour's opponents have seized on this issue as the weakest link in the policy. How can this be countered, remembering that Labour has still to convince a large slice of the electorate and needs to reduce or neutralise the extent of international opposition?

It could say the following. As we are members of an alliance and our policy is for this to continue, in government we shall talk to our partners about this policy and what consequences it would have for them. Within the Nato umbrella there are a wide range of separate conditions and agreements which individual countries have negotiated. In the 1986 referendum the Spanish government supported its membership of NATO on the basis of a series of non-nuclear conditions and Lord Carrington, Nato's secretary general, acknowledged its right to do so. In line with this diversity and in recognition of national sovereignty, a Labour government intends to renegotiate the conditions by which American nuclear bombers and bases are kept at certain British bases. This is a particularly appropriate course since, apart from a special lease agreement at Holy Loch, the bases are British and the conditions by which these weapons are stationed here have never been clarified or made public. We intend to enter negotiations with the US government on this matter which shall be concluded within the life time of a parliament.

The approach and adjustments suggested in this article would give Labour a more coherent and comprehensive strategy, more able to engage with the doubts and reservations lodged in the minds of millions of voters. Labour also needs to be prepared for a surprise outcome to Mrs Thatcher's visit to Moscow before Easter. Despite her cold war rhetoric, this trip is being meticulously prepared in consultation with the French and West German governments. Thus, Mrs Thatcher may, in some respects, be presenting a common West European viewpoint. It is certainly unlikely to be just a ceremonial or commercial occasion. Some confidence-building measures, a statement on chemical weapons and an offer on battlefield nuclear weapons are among the possibilities which cannot be ruled out.

Yet while West European governments recognise the sea-change occurring in Moscow there is little sign that presently they have the desire or will to seek far-reaching agreements. Certainly Chancellor Kohl seems to have ruled these out. Thus even more hinges on the outcome of the British election.

The outcome of the defence debate is still open. The Tories have their own weak spots including Trident, slavishness to President Reagan and an abysmal multilateralist record in office. Perhaps, above all, it is an area where Mrs Thatcher speaks to the past – to the days when Stalin ran the Kremlin and Britain had a world empire. She has an atavistic appeal which is powerful but possibly on the wane. Yet it will need to be a comprehensive defence and disarmament policy clearly put and convincingly argued to defeat her. ●

Defence Policy And Public Opinion

The poll data given below are based on four surveys, all conducted by Gallup. The four are October 1, 1985; August 25, 1986 (commissioned by CND); November 15, 1986 (commissioned by Policy Research Associates, a rightwing political group); and November 25, 1986:

'Do you agree or disagree that Britain should get rid of its nuclear weapons whatever other countries do?'
Agree 44%
Disagree 46%
Don't know 10%
(Gallup, Aug 25, 1986)

'Do you think that Britain should or should not complete its current programme of building four Trident missile submarines to replace the Polaris submarines when they become obsolete in the 1990s?'
Should 49%
Should not 36%
Don't know 15%
(Gallup, Nov 15, 1986)

'Cancel the Trident submarine missile programme.'
Approve 40%
Disapprove 41%
Don't know 19%
(Gallup, Oct 1, 1985)

'Do you think that having our own independent nuclear missiles makes Britain a safer or less safe place to live?'
Safer 52%
Less Safe 29%
No difference 13%
Don't know 6%
(Gallup, Nov 25, 1986)

'Do you think the siting of American nuclear missiles in Britain makes Britain a safer or less safe place to live?'
Safer 37%
Less safe 44%
No difference 11%
Don't know 7%
(Gallup, Nov 25, 1986)

'Do you think that Britain should or should not remove Cruise nuclear weapons from this country, whether or not the Soviet Union dismantles its SS20 nuclear missiles?'
Should 39%
Should not 48%
Don't know 13%
(Gallup, Nov 15, 1986)

'Should we send Cruise missiles back to the US?'
Should 52%
Should not 39%
Don't know 9%
(Gallup, Oct 1, 1985)

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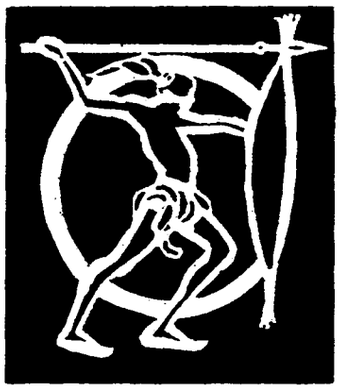

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Master of Arts

At the end of last year, **Arnold Kettle** (below), a leading communist intellectual, died after a long and painful illness. We reprint here the speech given by **Eric Hobsbawm** at his funeral.

Some time ago, when Arnold read the obituary of an old friend and former comrade, he was struck by the absence of any reference to the man's politics. He hoped that when his time came, his politics would not be forgotten. Well, they have not been, at least by the reactionaries and witch-hunters. Bernard Levin in Murdoch's *Times* spent four columns attacking him on January 5. I suppose it is a sort of compliment to be able to arouse the self-indulgent fury of a well-known super-hack from beyond the grave.

How could Arnold's politics be forgotten? He belonged to the generation of Cambridge students for whom politics meant not the choice of a daily newspaper or an occasional vote, nor even, as for many leftwingers of more recent vintage, a series of *rites of passage* which can take a person from Maoism to Toryism between leaving school and finishing a PhD. It meant a commitment for life. I do not say that it always meant a lifetime commitment to the Communist Party, which we all then joined – Arnold did so in 1936 – though it was a lifetime of Arnold's loyalty to his party which provoked Levin's hysteria. But even those who separated from the party after years, sometimes still feeling its presence in their lives as people can have feeling in a limb which has been amputated, for the most part stayed on the Left. This is more than can be said of ex-communist intellectuals in some other countries.

I speak today as an old comrade and friend of Arnold and Margot, his wife, but chiefly as a member of his generation of student Communists. Hardly any of us were from working-class families, although we in the Cambridge student CP of the 1930s were almost certainly not, typically, the upper-class products of top public schools of current mythology about the interwar Cambridge Left. We joined in the shadows of fascism, slump and war. Our proletarian experiences were marginal, at least until we joined the forces: welcoming hunger marchers in Cambridge, distributing leaflets for local bus-strikers, going to anti-Mosley demos in London. Even our most profound political experiences were indirect: we saw the Spanish civil war from afar, or at best through the few of us who fought and died in it, like John Cornford. Only later did Arnold acquire a more direct experience of the anti-fascist struggle in wartime Yugoslavia, and of imperialism in pre-independence India.

And yet the political commitment we then acquired was neither superficial nor just a youthful phase. We learned that the world needed changing, and we wanted to change it. We still do. Fifty years later we are old, less certain, less clear about exactly what we would want the changed world to be like, though we have unfortunately discovered some of the things we don't want it to be like. We don't expect to see it in our lifetime. But, like Arnold to his dying day, we are unreconciled to the immoral and inhuman system of capitalism, and we believe that, if it is not overcome, its internal contradictions will be fatal to mankind and to civilisation. We have seen no reason to unlearn the fundamental lesson of our youth.

Many of us gave the cause complete priority over everything else in our lives for many years. Arnold did. Only a few of us became full-time political militants, though we tried to practise our trade and profession in the light of our convictions. Arnold, though he probably did his best, most effective and most important political work as a marxist literary critic and an extraordinarily sensitive, gifted and caring teacher, came closer than most of us to being a full-time activist, through his long membership of the party's executive committee which he joined in the years of the first cold war. He was one of the rare members of our generation of intellectuals to become a nationally leading figure. But then he came from Pembroke, a college which for some reason had the densest concentration of political activists in Cambridge. At the time it produced leaders of the Socialist Club and CP, later leaders of national trade unions and communist parties. As I talk, names float back into my mind from all those years ago, the living and the dead, the remembered and forgotten, those who are still political and those who have gone elsewhere: Ram Nahum, Pieter Keuneman, Gerald Croasdell, Arnold Kettle, Spencer, Hodgart, Pascal, Birley, Wallis...

As I say these names, others cluster in on me, and I am surrounded by the faces of 50 years ago, the smell of the rooms, the memory of committee meetings, agendas and afternoons on the river. And I can hear the voices, among them the curiously and quite needlessly tentative voice of the young Communist Arnold Kettle.

It is hard for those of us who never knew the obligations of national leadership to judge those who were bound by them, as Arnold felt himself to be, especially in the traumatic year 1956. It was a tense time, and although, happily, personal relations did not suffer, political relations deteriorated between those who followed the official line, as he did, and those who criticised it. It would be wrong to conceal that it sometimes took a while to re-establish political understanding and intimacy, but in the end we once again found ourselves in agreement, as the Prague Spring of 1968 was to prove.

Now he is dead, after much suffering, and before his time: for while 70 years is old, it is no longer a dying age. At least this has meant that at his funeral Arnold is surrounded not only by people of all ages who loved and respected him, but by people of his own time, who knew without the need for historical explanations and commentaries what made him live his life the way he did. And who know that it was a life worth living and why it was so. But Arnold would not want us to dwell on his and our past. The world still needs changing, and this country more even than in 1936. And there are still things that even we veterans can do about it, even if they are not quite what we expected 50 years ago. As we say goodbye to Arnold there is still a future to think of, and he would want us to think of it. But we shall not forget him or our common past either. ●

Arnold Kettle: 1916-1986. Taught at Leeds University, 1946-67; as Professor of Literature at Dar es Salaam 1967-1970, and at the Open University 1970-81. On the executive committee of the Communist Party 1954-1967. Editorial board of *Marxism Today* 1957-1986.

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In Fear Of Feelings

Emotions, as we all know, are pretty powerful stuff. But when it comes to politics, **Elena Lieven** argues that we often pretend they don't really exist

Politically emotion is of immense importance yet we rarely think about it. Politicians appeal constantly to the emotions – think of Kinnock and Thatcher on unemployment and defence. The peace movement also depends on emotion a great deal, particularly fear. And the British public sometimes responds in a way that shows emotion to be a major political force as during the Falklands war, with Live Aid and in response to the Chernobyl disaster.

The Left and progressive movements ought to be thinking about how emotion works and what sort of emotions we should be trying to engender. Instead we are grateful for those emotions that work in our favour and don't really understand those that work against us.

In addition, and because we don't think about it, we tend to depend on the same emotions and responses as those of the Right rather than thinking about the transformatory possibilities of a politics of emotion. Fear, chauvinism and selfishness are the tools of the Right. Even if such emotions bring us short-term gains in support, what are the long-term effects on the possibility of change, if we use such emotions? We have to change people, and not just structures, if we are to start moving in the direction of the sort of society that we want.

But emotion is hard to think about: complex and contradictory, and it is not going to be easy to integrate an emotional analysis with a political strategy, particularly as the place to start is with our own emotions.

One of the commonest implicit or explicit ways of dealing with emotion is to argue that it is best to avoid it altogether and stick to the rational. But to claim rationality while evading emotionality is to be *irrational*. Thus the frequent contrast between men as rational and women as emotional is best seen as a contrast between different ways of dealing with emotion. Men's emotionality is more likely to involve shouting, or icy logic, than bursting into tears. How many times have I argued with someone whose seemingly rational approach I know to be wrong, only to realise later what was being denied and hidden by one or both of us! The need to win an argument is usually at the expense of failing to hear what the other is saying.

Yet, despite the fact that the accusation of emotionality is almost always used to deny the rationality of what is being said, I am not arguing for the supremacy of the emotional over something called the rational but that the two are part of the same truly rational approach to understanding. Not prioritising feeling over rationality but integrating them. Without this integration we exist in a one-dimensional world from which we can never hope to understand the complexity of public and political emotion.

Where emotion is 'allowed' it is usually that of traditional leftwing emotions which celebrate male heroism and individual courage often in the cause of stand-up confrontation and often *lacking* rational analysis. But the ground for these emotions is reactive and often ends in defeat. And the struggle makes us hard and turns us into people that we don't want to be. The often violent reaction to the voicing of any criticism or doubt of these emotional reactions, for instance in the miners' strike, makes one suspect that they fulfil an important need for many of those on the traditional Left, and that they should be carefully examined. It is not that people should *not* respond to these emotions of solidarity in struggle – they reflect collective human oppression and the response to it. But they are not enough on their own, they too have their irrationality.

While there is argument about the details and even the scientific standing of psychoanalysis, many of its concepts now form an accepted and recognisable part of our ways of thinking about ourselves and others and can be extremely useful in helping us to understand emotion. People can act for reasons, and have deep felt needs, that they themselves may not consciously perceive; they can feel two contradictory emotions about the same event or person, which often leads to frustration and anger; they can 'block' something they don't want to hear, or mentally run away from it.

For these reasons, emotional reactions can seem totally out of proportion to the immediate precipitating event – either not enough emotion, too much of it or what seems an inappropriate reaction. But these things are not arbitrary, nor do they require years of individual psychotherapy to identify. With practice, they are recognisable and we can start to understand and deal with them.

Take attitudes to the nuclear arms race. I think we radically underestimate the disabling effects of two kinds of fear. One is the not unreasonable fear of nuclear war and the other is the fear of responsibility, of taking the future into our own hands. Fear, though obviously at a biological level crucial to survival, tends to be channelled by the human mind in ways that will buffer us from the animal responses of flight, fight or freeze. We fly from it in the mind rather than the body; block it or project it onto something less dangerous than the original fearful object. The seemingly unreasonable anger that we sometimes see in ourselves and others is often generated by deep fear; if we can't begin to understand this, we are likely to get very confused indeed.

Now there is no doubt that fear brings many people to the peace movement in the first place; the present phase of the European peace movements started with the decision to deploy Cruise missiles in Europe and the related decision, as many say it, to limit nuclear war to Europe.

And yet for every person who joins or is sympathetic, there may be a larger number whose fear paralyses them or is simply blocked off altogether and perhaps invested in anger against the people who arouse it. I think that we can see a similar blocking reaction in the peace movement when we protect ourselves by not thinking constantly about the horrors of nuclear war, yet this does not prevent us from acting. There is, however, also the possibility of a negative side to this, when the justifiable anger that we feel about the responsibility of politicians for the nuclear nightmare gets diverted into anger with each other or into obsessionality about one aspect of our work. For many of us, our fear is lessened by *doing* something and we gain strength from the possibility of a different future that we come to envisage. If we could understand this process better, perhaps we could extend it into the arenas of education and information which are a central part of CND's work and which, at the moment, may well be disabling many people by increasing their fear.

As well as the fear of nuclear devastation, we also have to come to terms with a deep fear of responsibility which seems to afflict huge numbers of people not excluding those on the Left and in the progressive movements. Why are people so afraid of change and so passionately committed to the *status quo*? Many people seem to have a need to believe in a benign and protective state that outweighs their rational fears and knowledge of what that state might and can do. At the same time, there is a widespread dislike and even disgust of

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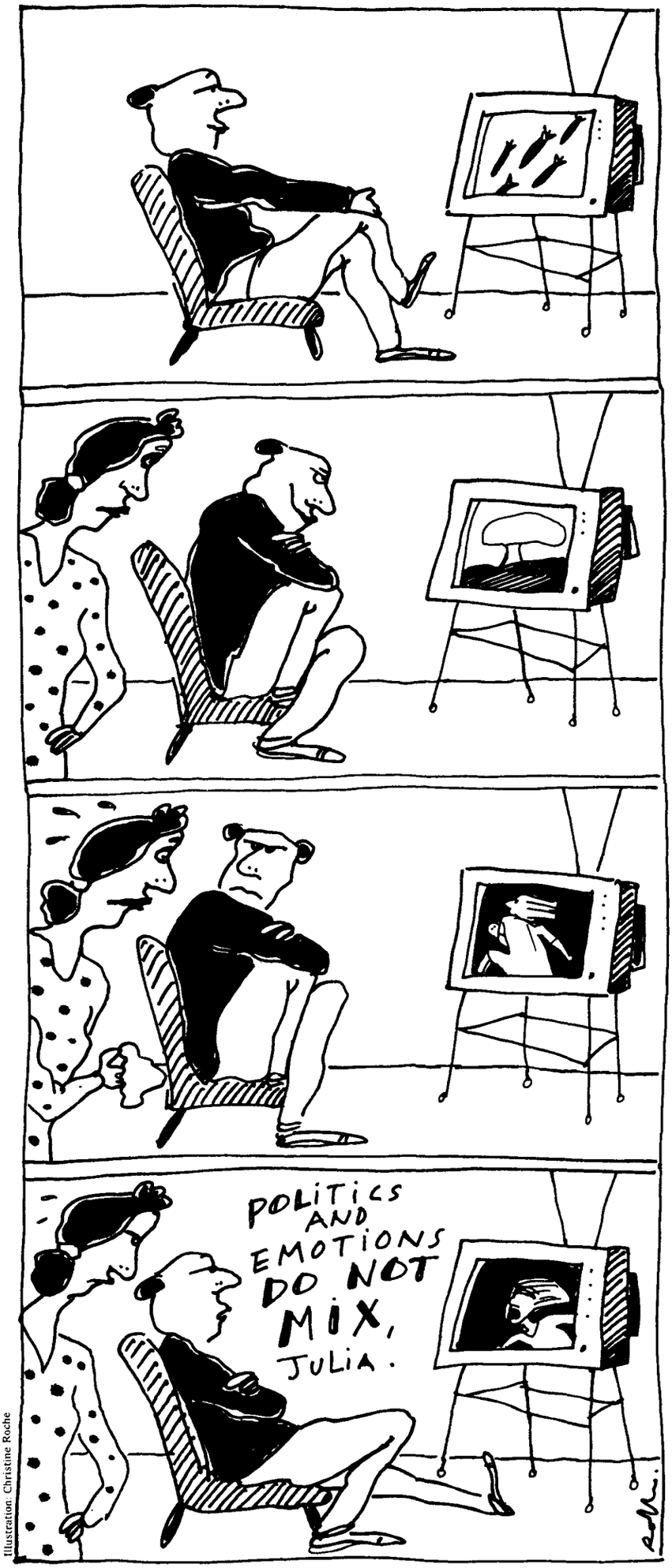

Illustration: Christine Roche

'Where emotion is allowed it is usually that of traditional leftwing emotions which celebrate male heroism and individual courage'

politicians and politics. This seems to suggest that the state is felt to be quite separate from politics and this, in turn, fits in with the idea that many people don't want to be offered choices, while at the same time resenting those who do the choosing.

At the risk of sounding very reductionist, this seems to have a parallel in the tension between the freedoms of childhood and those of mature adulthood. In childhood, others take decisions for you, which can be very pleasurable but, of course, at the same time, you may well resent them for doing so. Maturity lies in a self-reliance and autonomy which is not afraid of responsibility, but even those who manage to achieve this fairly fully experience a longing for others to take decisions for them.

The strategic difficulty is that if the Left and the peace movement emphasise distrust of the state without also finding ways to help people towards self-reliance, it may simply be too threatening for people to deal with. And again perhaps, we can see the same complex emotional responses reflected in progressive politics: the resentment of hierarchies together with a refusal to take responsibility. Perhaps the twin dangers of blind faith in, and blind distrust of, leadership come from the same emotional roots? Again if we faced up to these things in our everyday practice, perhaps we could start to think how to solve them on a wider scale.

So we have to build personal and collective responsibility and create positive visions of the future. But you cannot help people face responsibility by *telling* them that they are responsible, particularly if you are also telling them that what they are responsible for is nasty. We have to build responsibility for ourselves and others by facing up to the difficulties and pain of it and with small, slow, practical steps. We also have to deal with fear, partly by bringing it into the open but also and crucially, by providing hope. We must enable and not disable people with our politics and until we can do that, I suspect that we will be going round and round with the Right on the treadmill of fear, distrust and powerlessness.

For all these reasons we must do much more conscious talking about emotion in politics, both personally and more generally, in both its positive and negative effects, rather than being bludgeoned into emotion on some occasions and denied it on others. Emotional responses have to be considered seriously and made part of the analysis of strategy. And finally we need much clearer ways of thinking about these exceedingly complex issues than I have managed here. They have always been central to the feminist project – what I've tried to do is to show that they are central to the entire progressive movement.

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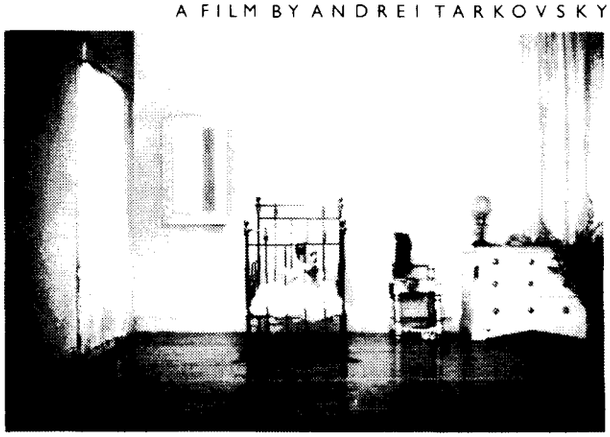

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Shadowy Guerrillas On The Fringes

There was a time when the most vocal critics of British broadcasting were on the Left. In those days, the broadcasters were most concerned with 'shadowy guerrillas on the fringes' such as the Glasgow Media Group, who throughout the late 70s and early 80s challenged the central notions of impartiality and neutrality which were seen to guide output.

Their criticism was based on the theoretical principle that there can be no real 'neutrality' in cultural production. Although broadcasting was formally organised as a public service, went the argument, it played a crucial role in the state apparatus of modern Britian as part of the ideological superstructure. The critique was informed by the ideas of Gramsci, Althusser and others, which were in turn based on a marxist, materialist analysis of the role of mass media in a capitalist society.

These critical voices, and that of the Glasgow Media Group in particular, attracted attention and were widely heard at a time when the political consensus in Britain was defined by the right wing of the Labour Party. When their book, *Bad News*, appeared in 1976 a Labour government was still in power. The left critique of public service broadcasting drived much of its resonance from the manner in which it challenged the cosy social democratic assumptions of that period.

But as we begin 1987, the terms of the media debate in Britain have been transformed. Public service broadcasting is in deep crisis; its existence threatened on the one hand by a sustained and vociferous assault from the radical Right in British politics (culminating in the Conservative central office dossier of BBC 'bias' in its news coverage of last year's Libyan crisis), and on the other by rapid technological development. The combined effect of these influences has been, and continues to be, the breakdown of the BBC/IBA broadcasting duopoly. However, in so doing, they also make the traditional left critique of the media increasingly irrelevant, and make necessary a rethink of attitudes and policies.

The moving force in this process has been the rise of Thatcherism. Since 1979 the political consensus in Britain has shifted sharply to the right, leaving social democracy floundering and confused. *Marxism Today* has described the consequences of this process in many articles over the years. In the field of the media it is now very obviously reflected in the Conservatives' approach to public service broadcasting.

There is now an ongoing struggle to redefine the core notion of 'impartiality' in broadcasting output. The new impartiality favoured by Mr Tebbit and his colleagues means no less than the uncritical acceptance of Thatcherist tenets. Whether in news, current affairs or drama, criticism of the Conservative government (implied or actual) is interpreted as 'bias', even subversion.

The mini-soap *Casualty* is singled out for dealing with the subject of hospital cuts. *The Monocled Mutineer* is attacked for dramatising an event in the first world war from a perspective other than that of the British establishment. Even reporting international criticism of a foreign power (as in the BBC's coverage of the Libyan crisis) is condemned as 'bias' if that foreign power is an ally of the Conservative government.

We have reached the stage where a leading Tory MP can speak seriously of 'a plot by the broadcasters to wreck the United Kingdom, to spread political poison, and to undermine the gratitude of the people for the unique privilege of being ruled by such a splendid government as we are fortunate to have'.

The greatest proportion of this criticism has fallen on the BBC, which cannot be explained merely by the fact that ITN's news coverage is dominated by Sir Alistair Burnett. There is a great deal

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of output on ITV and Channel 4 which the Conservative Party would rather not see. At the very height of the 'Spycatcher' court case in Australia, as the government was asserting it to be a matter of principle that no member of MI5 should be permitted to speak publicly about his or her work, Granada's *World In Action* repeated a lengthy interview with Peter Wright originally broadcast in 1984. And it was ITV which produced the recent series of documentaries on *Apartheid.*

Thus if the BBC is being accused of 'bias' more often than ITV or Channel 4 it cannot be due to the content of programming alone. In the view of one senior BBC executive the attacks are the product of 'a strong ideological wish to undermine the BBC as an institution, to discredit it in functional terms and prepare the ground for a practical attack on its operations'.

The radical Right's attempt to redefine the concept of impartiality in line with its own preferred notion of the 'consensus' is matched by a determination to privatise and deregulate the BBC. ITV and Channel 4 are privately-owned (though guided by the public service ethos), and are thus to some extent immune from this pressure. The BBC, with its reliance on public funding and rejection of crude commerciality, is in media terms the antithesis of all that Thatcherism stands for. By labelling the BBC as a bunch of subversives the Conservatives clearly hope to enlist support for their ultimate goal of breaking it up and selling it off.

While the conclusions of the Peacock Committee were less favourable than the government had hoped, the campaign wll intensify if the Conservatives win a third term in office.

This ideologically-based assault on the BBC has been reinforced by important technological changes which in themselves tend to weaken the traditional conception of public service broadcasting. Cable, satellite and video are increasing the range of televisual options available to the population, and encourage the government to push ahead with its plans for deregulation (though not entirely successfully, as the experience of cable has shown). These innovations create the technological base on which the government's media strategy is based. Regardless of how it ultimately fares with the ideologues of the Conservative Party, the BBC will have to come to terms with a changing technical and commercial environment.

As for the British Left, it must formulate a response to all of these changing circumstances. In relation to the developing technologies of information and communication, it must resist the influx of Rupert Murdoch-type media entrepreneurs into an ever-expanding market. On the other hand, the Left should not be afraid to seize the opportunities which new technology will bring. While the labour movement spends £7m on its forthcoming national newspaper the future will bring tv and radio broadcasting into its price range. At present the law prevents a media system like that which exists in Italy (where communists have their own radio stations) from arising here, but the law could be changed by a future Labour government, and access allowed to political organisations.

Of more immediate importance is the problem of how to deal with the present Conservative attack on public service broadcasting. Having seen its thunder stolen by the radical Right, the Left is presented with a dilemma: whether to defend a system of which it has historically, and with good reason, been suspicious and critical, or to support that system as a lingering bastion of a consensus more humane and liberal than the one Mr Tebbit would impose on us? The dispute between the BBC and the government reflects an ideological struggle within the British state of unusual intensity, and it will not do for the British Left to stand idly by. ●

Brian McNair

The Subversive Laugh?

A few months ago an edition of Rory Bremner's BBC2 comedy show closed with a brief dialogue between Jeremy Hardy and John Dowie, two performers culled, like Bremner himself, from the burgeoning alternative cabaret circuit which centres on London pubs and provincial colleges. Musing on the links between comedy and political parties, they observed that the Conservatives had got Jim Davidson, the extreme Right had Bernard Manning ... But who had the Labour Party got? Answer: 'Neil Kinnock'.

Ten years ago this kind of exchange would have been unthinkable. It was only really with the last election and Kenny Everett's infamous 'let's bomb Russia' joke that the link between comedy and party poilitics was explicitly made. It was around 1979 that the term 'alternative comedy' was coined. But what are the politics of this comedy, and what is its relationship to 'mainstream' humour?

The term 'alternative comedy' is said to have been originated by stand-up comic Tony Allen to advertise a tour by comedians based at London's Comedy Store venue. Some of the roots of this comedy, however, stretch back at least to the early 1950s and the emergence of such radio comedies as *The Goon Show. The Goon Show,* written largely by Spike Milligan, ran from 1952 to 1956 and was mildly subversive, both of existing comedic forms – being more surrealistic and less cosy than 40s' comedies like *ITMA* and *Much Binding in the Marsh* – and of contemporary attitudes: the character of Major Denis Bloodnock, for example, mocked the diehard empire loyalists of the period.

None of the Goons, however, had university backgrounds – unlike the writer-performers of *Beyond The Fringe,* whose revue, first performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1960, is widely held to have set in motion the British 'satire boom'. The cast – Alan Bennett, Jonathan Miller, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore – were all Oxbridge graduates. Bennett has since commented on the disproportionate reception *Beyond The Fringe* was given – as if it had been indiscriminately 'mowing down sacred cows'. In 1960, though, it was strong stuff and it contained two elements very prominent in British comedy since that time: *parody of social types* (the unctious clergyman, the fan who watches the same show again and again, partly in the hope of spotting a noble personage in the Royal Box) and the *political lampoon.* (Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, shrewdly catching the mood of the time, attended a performance and laughed ostentatiously at Peter Cook's impersonation of him).

Image victim: Tina Turner

'Satire' was now hailed as a breath-of-fresh-air renovating the British political scene. The Establishment Club, providing satirical cabaret, opened in Soho in 1961 and, in 1962, satire was imported into BBC television (through, be it noted, the Current Affairs department) in

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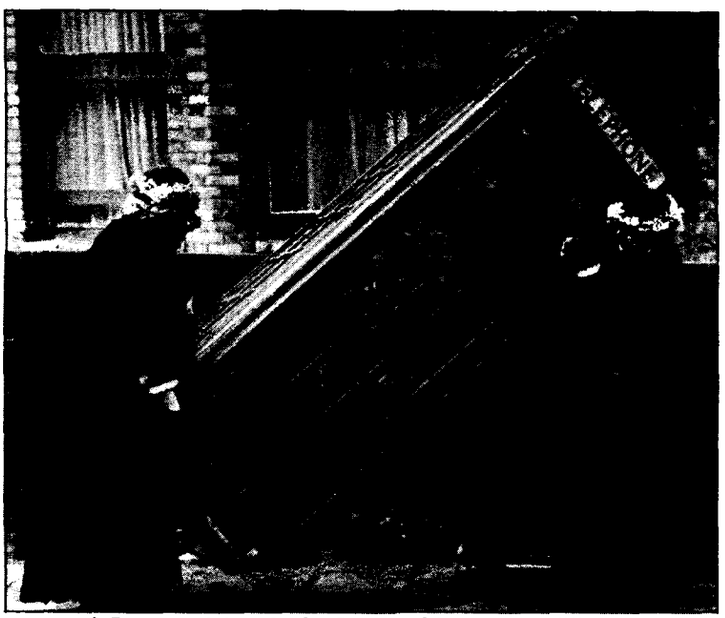

Revenge of the suburbs: Python with something different

the form of *That Was The Week That Was* (*TW3*). Twenty three years on the final show of *TW3* remains, in parts, remarkably acerbic. Its politics, too, are quite clear: on *social* questions such as gay rights (a sketch ridicules the role of the civil service in the Vassall affair) and racism (Millicent Martin sings a swingeing lyric about racism in the Deep South of the USA, accompanied by dancers, dressed as BBC *Black and White Minstrels*) they side unequivocally with the angels.

But, on *political* matters, they are iconoclastic, attacking politicians as a *breed*, across the political spectrum, dispensing lampoons and jokes about broken promises, lack of policy, and so on. Occasionally the sketches were fierce – as with David Frost and William Rushton's spoof *This Is Your Life* on the then Home Secretary Henry Brooke – but always the focus was upon individual politicians, their foibles and failings.

The BBC now looked to Oxbridge for further comic material. *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again*, a radio programme which ran from 1964 to 1970, was performed and mostly written by the cast of the highly successful Cambridge Footlights revue of 1963. Most of the show's writers were used by David Frost (whose main role on the comedy scene was as entrepreneur, not as performer or writer) for his *Frost Report* of 1966-7 – an importation of the irreverent, sketch-based undergraduate format into mainstream tv comedy.

Acknowledging Milligan and the amiably incomprehensible 'Professor' Stanley Unwin as influences, they hankered after something sharper and more surrealistic. This came in the form of the obscurely titled *At Last The 1948 Show* in 1967 and, in the same year and also on ITV, *Do Not Adjust Your Set*. The latter was a children's programme partly inspired by the popularity of *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again* among the young. Comedy, like popular music, often expresses, and defines, generation gaps – a fact itself parodied in the recent *The Young Ones*). Representatives of these two shows combined in 1969 to produce arguably the most substantial and successful work of this genre: *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

I don't think it's pretentious to suggest that *Python* was in some sense an artistic anticipation of Thatcherism: if Thatcherism is 'the revenge of the suburbs', the social groups which *Python* spoke for were among the objects of its vengeance. The programme offered an horrendous procession of respectable, semi-detached monsters doing silly walks, jumping up and down with knotted handkerchieves on their heads, busily rubbing lard on the cat's boil while Hitler and Goebbels, in full Nazi regalia, went on the stump in the Minehead by-election: the sketches were often humorously defensive, being broken up by brusque army officers ('This is silly') or condemned in fictitious letters from the home counties, but they were in many cases only one step ahead of reality: in the early 1970s for instance *Python* invented a tv programme called 'Prejudice' in which viewers were asked to think of a silly name for the Belgians. We all laughed when Michael Palin, as the leering compere, announced the winner ('The Sprouts') but, in the early 1980s, during the 'Sheep Meat' dispute, *The Sun* was actually appealing to its readers for silly names to call the French.

The arrival of the next 'cult' tv comedy *Not The Nine O'Clock News* routinised this approach. Four actors here performed sketches contributed to, as in *TW3*, by a team of writers. The scripts showed a strong bias toward parodies of well-known tv programmes, adverts and personnel. Pamela Stephenson, the show's principal mimic eschewed any notion of venom in her impersonations, and, in one programme, newsreaders Jan Leeming and Angela Rippon took part, rating Stephenson's performance in the manner of ice dancing judges. Television remains the main subject matter for even the best of the current writers – Victoria Wood, for example – and 'impressions' have become a required part of any aspiring comedian's repertoire. Many thus become, at best, human parrots purveying meaningless echoes of famous voices or, at worst, professional sycophants – mere adjuncts to the cult of celebrity.

This can also be said of the overpraised *Spitting Image*, first broadcast by Central TV in 1984. Undeniably savage and daring in some of its portrayals, *Spitting Image* is based ultimately on the same rightwing iconoclasm as *TW3* and *Private Eye*, assuming everyone in the public eye to be equally suspect and open to ridicule, irrespective of creed or cause. This is the ethos of the popular press and daytime Radio One, on which DJs like Steve Wright enthusiastically endorse the show: 'Great show again last night, lads. But I do think they ought to lay off the Queen Mum, don't you'.

Spitting Image, in any event, confirms, rather than undermines, the cult of personality: the rising generation of media-wise politicians (Edwina Currie, for instance) must regard it as a positive boon to their work in the 'being famous' business. Indeed, the impressionists *and* the puppets are celebrities themselves and, like other celebrities, can be hired for business functions: it emerged recently that ITV's ex-footballers Jimmy Greaves and Ian St John cost less to hire than the two *Spitting Image* puppets of them.

In recent times the other bearers of the subversive comic tradition have been the Comedy Store performers of the late 1970s. These, like the artists currently on the alternative cabaret circuit, are drawn mainly from colleges, polytechnics, and redbrick universities. A number of them are socialists, or have socialist sympathies – notably Ben Elton, stand-up comic and writer (*The Young Ones*, *Blackadder II*).

Interestingly, in a recent issue of *New Socialist* (December 1985) those ex-Comedy Store comics who have become commercially successful (*The Young Ones*, *Five Go Mad In Dorset*, *Saturday Night Live*, *Girls On Top*) were accused of 'absorption into mainstream showbiz'. A comedienne on the circuit – one of depressingly few – was quoted as saying: 'When I read that Sarah Ferguson had listed alternative cabaret among her pursuits at college, I

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knew it wasn't anything I wanted to be associated with any more'.

For a comic like Elton, playing on tour to university audiences, the problem is mostly the opposite. He can assume an antipathy to racism and sexism more safely than an opposition to capitalism (and the same goes for a Comedy Store audience). He addresses them instead as undergraduates (jokes about sex, medical students...), as young people (his 'I hate fuckin' Hippies' recalls Malcolm Maclaren's strategy for the Sex Pistols) and consumers (grumbles about the toilets in motorway service stations), slagging the Tories only in asides.

Finally, as to Sarah Ferguson, this is not the fault of the alternative comedian: once a joke falls among its audience they are free to do what they like with it. The new generation of Sloane Rangers, lawyers, executives, accountants, Big Bang stockbrokers and the like have more *instrumental* values than their predecessors: while sustaining the accepted code at work, they are quite happy to hear the piss taken out of it during their leisure time ('It's a game, isn't it'). In any case, short of staying physically outside the main media, a comedian may find it impossible to resist absorption into 'mainstream showbiz'. For example, *Monty Python* once performed a stinging parody of show business award ceremonies, in which a cringeing compere eulogised, and handed an Oscar to, David Niven's fridge. Not only did the Variety Club confer an award on the (absent) Pythons, they actually showed the sketch in tribute.

For myself, the tv humour I laughed loudest at in 1986 was the wry dialogue which permeated the scripts of BBC1's excellent *Casualty*. Here the jokes were given an edge by the humanity of the characters and by their *context*, which was one of struggle against health service cuts. Pleasingly, Lise Mayer, a creator of *The Young Ones*, was among the scriptwriters. ●

Stephen Wagg

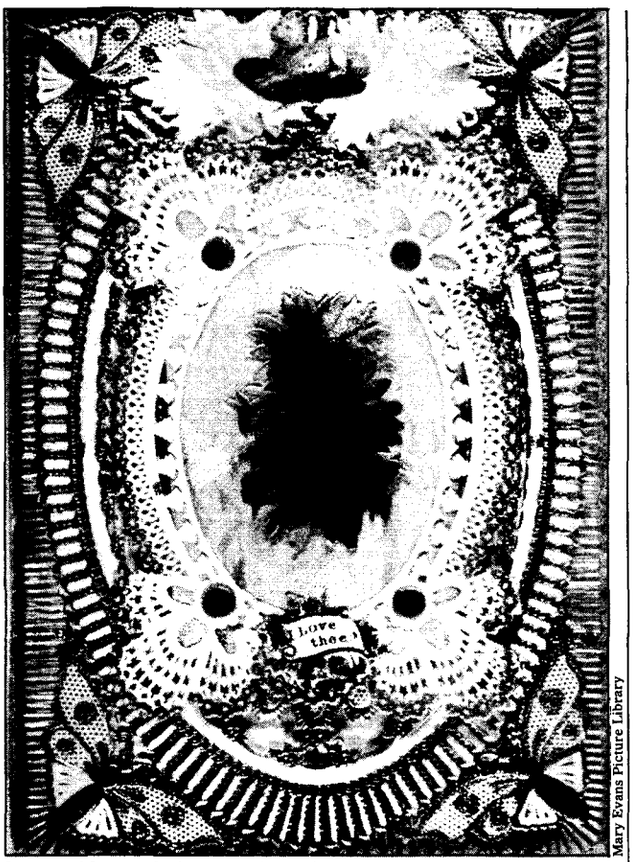
Love Tokens

We may have heaved a collective sigh of relief as the Christmas cards came down in early January, but for the card manufacturers and retailers this was merely a brief pause before the next sales peak, St Valentine's Day. Greetings cards are now big business. We can mark every occasion in our lives by the sending of a card: birth, marriage, sickness, retirement, as well as an increasing round of seasonal festivals. It is surprising to find then that, among all of these, it is the most despised and inadmissable of all, the secret valentine, that alone can claim a real historical tradition.

St Valentine's link with the cult of romance is entirely an accident of timing. February 14 also marked the eve of the Roman festival of Lupercalia, when priests with painted faces and wearing only loin-cloths ran about the city striking the women whom they met in a ceremony supposed to make them fruitful.

But the sending of love tokens on Valentine's Day has a different and more optimistic origin. In the medieval period, lovers exchanged vows and gifts on February 14, when it was believed the seasonal mating of birds began. The practice of exchanging love tokens has continued ever since. Increasingly bawdy and licentious in the 16th century, beautifully engraved and coloured by the 18th century, the valentine became commercialised after 1840.

In 1848, a young woman called Esther Howard set up the New England Valentine Co, and became the leading manufacturer of high-class valentines in the United States. Most commercial valentines were produced by women, and could be works of art lavishly decorated with lace, swansdown, mother-of-pearl, or cambric flowers, concealing secret messages of affection. They could also be vulgar or cruel,



Mary Evans Picture Library

Lace and luxury before the days of mass market romance

anonymity being used to convey emotions of spite as well as of love. Something of that ambiguity survives in the iconography of the modern valentine which, alongside the romantic imagery of satin hearts and red roses, also includes the 'joke' card loaded with sexist humour.

The celebration of St Valentine's Day is not then simply a product of modern consumerism which exploits our need to love and be loved for the profit of card and chocolate manufacturers. But why do we still buy and send valentine cards each year?

One possible answer is linked to current debates within feminism and on the Left about the meaning of romance. Traditionally feminists, like many socialists, have dismissed Valentine's Day, along with mass market romance, as a con trick, duping women into passive acceptance of gender roles. More recently, feminist cultural critics have suggested a different way of looking at the popular culture of romance, arguing for the importance of fantasy, and of the personal, in shaping the political sphere. From this perspective, what is interesting about St Valentine's Day is that women as well as men send valentines to their lovers. It offers an opportunity to signal desire – or else to send it up – in a world where women are still expected to play a passive role.

Have I convinced myself at least that St Valentine's Day, with its long cultural tradition and with ideological permission from modern feminism, is a *good thing*? I'm not so sure. It still reminds me too much of those adolescent insecurities and unspoken anxieties, of waiting for the phone to ring. Instead I suggest we start celebrating a different date in the calendar, February 29th Leap Year, when women propose directly to their lovers. It may only come once in four years but, symbolically at least, maybe it is worth the wait. ●

Rosemary Betterton

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Valentine's Day seems as good as any other.

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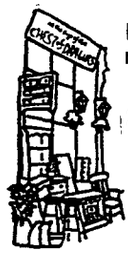

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60 Years In The Cultural Crossfire

Jack Lindsay at 87 is currently working on his 171st book. Since he arrived in Britain in 1926, he has made his living by writing, as a poet, novelist, playwright, classical scholar, art-historian, literary critic, historian, writer on science, philosophy and politics. He was a key figure in the literary debates on the Left in the 1930s and 1940s, and was an editor of the magazines *Our Time, Arena,* and *Anvil.* He joined the Communist Party in 1941. His most recent books include *The Crisis in Marxism* – a critical study of the writings of Lukacs, Althusser, Bloch and Gramsci. He now lives in Cambridge, where he talked to Andy Croft.

Why did you come to Britain in the first place?
Well, I was naturally interested in English poetry. I'd been working in Australia, doing what I could around poetry there, and when the chance came to go to England and do some publishing over here I thought this would be an excellent chance of getting to know a bit of what was really going on in poetry in England.

Why do you think so many writers from different backgrounds should have all ended up on the Left in the second half of the 1930s?
I suppose there was in a general way the feeling that something had gone wrong. We all felt we had to try and change society.

How would you describe the literary culture of the Left in those years of the Popular Front?
I wouldn't make any great claims – it wasn't a great culture. Nevertheless it was a good culture I think. There was good work from Rex Warner, Ralph Bates, BL Coombes; on the critical side there was Alick West and Ralph Fox. It was based on a struggle to find out what was going wrong in society, getting away from the individualistic points of view – but keeping respect for the individual of course.

What was the role of the Communist Party in that literary culture?
As I looked around, I found that the one body which seemed to have an affinity with my point of view, that felt that something was very badly wrong in society that was trying to find a way through this impasse into new ways, was the Communist Party. One more or less turned to that. This was felt quite widely. People like Edgel Rickword and myself, and people like Spender, were very influenced, and this led in turn to more and more attention being paid to the cultural initiatives of the Communist Party. The Spanish Civil War was the thing that brought it all together in a clear, strong and precise way. It had an enormous effect on intellectuals.

Most literary historians have assumed that this cultural 'movement' died in 1939 with the outbreak of the war. You have argued that, on the contrary, there was a much bigger and more popular 'cultural upsurge' taking place in this country through the war years . . .
Yes. Naturally there was, with the war, a strong check to those forms in which things had been going on in the 30s. To a degree there was a real anti-fascist element in the war which came out stronger as the war developed. It was rooted in people and was a development of the whole thing that had been going on in the 30s. The direct connection wasn't seen in a simple way but one felt it was there. So I was very concerned to try to relate this anti-fascist struggle in the war to the whole struggle for human values – liberty, freedom and so on – in the history of the nation.

What do you think were the enduring successes of that period between 1935 and, say, 1945?
Some of our concerns and general ideas came out very strongly and played their part in turning the war into a real anti-fascist war. There was a very considerable amount of cultural activity during the war. In the localities there was a great deal of cultural activity which has gone unrecorded: the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, ENSA, in air-raid shelters, factories, canteens and so on. But I don't think it could have occurred without what had gone on in the 30s.

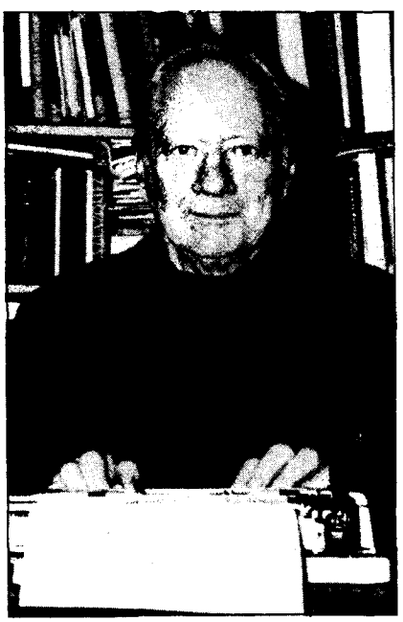
However, the election of the Labour government in 1945 was to prove not the high-point of this 'cultural upsurge' but ironically its end-point . . .
That is true. The Labour Party itself didn't recognise the forces that had put it there and made it. The Labour government didn't do anything to develop these forces. They saw the election as purely political and they didn't go ahead to build on the forces that had brought it into power. Therefore those forces broke down over a period of years, and things apparently got back to the old simple Labour-Conservative thing, with the really exciting cultural initiatives that had been present in 1945 disappearing.

In 1949 the Communist Party organised a conference on culture at which you gave a discussion paper, severely critical of the classical 'base-superstructure' analysis of culture.
It was an effort to get away from a rather mechanical approach to the use of the terms base and superstructure. In that sense I think it was correct. There is a vital relationship between base and superstructure – that's correct – but I think it was being used in a superficial way so that the value of culture was not fully recognised. It was seen only as something coming out of the material forces, and not as playing an active part in a series of dialectical interactions. That was why I was attacking *that* model.

The Communist Party had been very successful in intervening in British cultural life in the 1930s and in the war years. Why do you think it minimised the role of culture in the 1950s?
It's hard to analyse that in any simple way. I suppose these notions were diverted so strongly into the war that re-integration of the ideas in the new situation was difficult and there was a tendency to turn to direct political matters. There was a tendency to oversimplify the issues.

One of your most recent books was *The Crisis in Marxism*. Why did you write about this?
I suppose there are a number of reasons. Partly the feeling that marxism wasn't playing the part it should play. There was a tendency to get lost in points of controversy and so on. I wanted to try to break through to the fundamental points of marxism as opposed to going along those lines. The book does make an effort to get at what is marxism in our day.

On the face of it, it is a pessimistic book . . .
Yes. Probably that comes from the feeling that there'd been so many things from the 30s on, where one felt things were coming together politically and culturally, and they've all broken down again. Things today seem much weaker now than they were at any point then. I wanted to know how these elements could get together again. It wasn't just a matter of calling for them. That would just be talking to oneself. But, how could I do something to start people thinking about them again? ●



Lindsay: cultured politics

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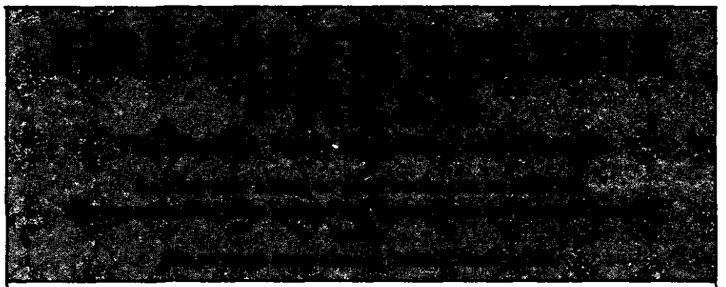

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Pit Villages and the Miner's Strike of 1984-5

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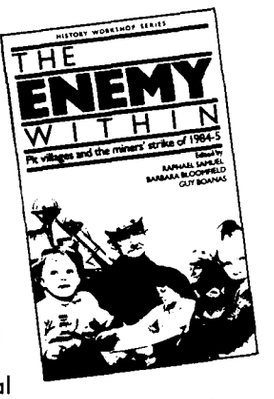

The miner's strike was more than an industrial dispute. It was a social drama which engaged competing moralities, both in and outside the coalfields. *The Enemy Within* challenges the notion that this was 'Scargill's strike', arguing that leaders are not causes but effects and that all the crucial initiatives in the strike were local. This is a book of first-hand testimonies which are a witness to the exceptional resilience in Britain of attachment to 'traditional ways' as well as the potency of the influences corroding them.
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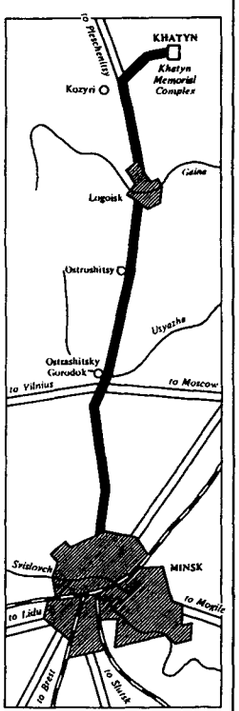

The second edition of this reliable guide will be welcomed as increasing numbers of motorists plan visits to the Soviet Union. All the routes given have been tested by the authors and have been newly revised and brought up to date. Apart from the detailed practical information covering places of interest, hotels, restaurants and services, there is also a wealth of description and historical information. Provided with the book is a useful set of road-maps covering major routes and street plans of Moscow and Leningrad. This new edition of the Louis Guide will be of interest both to motorists and other visitors to the Soviet Union.

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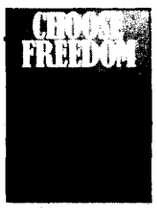

Time to Come Clean

Choose Freedom: The Future of Democratic Socialism
Roy Hattersley
Michael Joseph £12.95 hbk.

This is a serious book, composed as a whole, not a series of articles quickly and loosely stitched together; and it is well worth considering seriously. This can be said for few books by senior politicians. The mystery is why they attempt them at all: political prudence does not always contain a statesman's vanity.

Whatever you think of Roy Hattersley's final position, this book at least refutes the belief of the wicked that he doesn't have one. It is an impressive, if only partly successful, attempt to state the principles and theories of what we would once have unambiguously called 'social democracy'. Thinkers on the Left will find – as they say – much to disagree with. But if they must label this simply as the credo of the right wing of the Labour Party, they should note four things: (i) it has a clear theoretical basis; (ii) it is rooted in the history of the Labour Party and has a deep sociological sense of Labour's actual constituency; (iii) in both these respects it is distanced decisively from the ideology and interests of the SDP; and (iv) it will force rightwing anti-theory pragmatists to think (if anything can).

The most important part of the book is chapter eight, 'There Must Be Markets'. Socialists have often been trapped by their own rhetoric about planning, or by their general theories, into identifying market pricing exclusively with the capitalist system. His demand for the Labour Party to come clean and think is wholly salutory.

Did it need Alec Nove's **The Economics of Feasible Socialism**, (at last he has got the readership he has always deserved) to convince us all that a totally planned economy can only work badly both in terms of efficiency and in terms of social justice and human happiness? 'Oh, of course I don't mean small scale stuff,' I've heard theorists of the new Left say casually and irritably – certainly not Sarah's craftshop or Peter's health boutique. Hayek is wrong that capitalism is a necessary condition for human freedom, yet certainly no market means no freedom.

The degree of regulation, control and ownership that Hattersley thinks necessary for social welfare does distinguish his mental framework utterly from the David Owenites. In principle he allows any degree of state intervention in the market if it is not destructive of efficiency or general liberty.

But public ownership is not an end in itself. Despite his continued praise of Crosland, he does not rely as much as Gaitskell or Crosland on fiscal controls and the redistributivist effect (if we ever got it right) of taxation. If 'social ownership' is a bit fudgy, it is fudge that runs in the right direction. But unlike the Left, Hattersley does not neglect the intricacies and social justice issues of taxation policy.

Since the mighty vision of the Webbs, Shaw and Wells failed, and the new polytechnics of the 1960s did not produce generations of socialist engineers and managers, then indeed we must not kill the goose that could perhaps again lay golden eggs.

He offers four principles to govern the existence of markets in socialist societies: (i) In areas of social provision, scarce resources must be allocated according to need not purchasing power. (ii) Public utilities should be owned where market forces make short-term decisions contrary to long-term industrial and national needs. (iii) Monopolies little affected by market forces need public control. (iv) 'In the rest of the economy, the market... is, with all its imperfections, the best basis on which to base the distribution of available resources.' But these are at the end of the one chapter. The recent Fabian pamphlet and symposium **Market Socialism: Whose Choice?** if speculative and inconclusive, faces the problems in a less generalised way.

The bulk of the book is about freedom, and though politicaly needed it is rather thin stuff theoretically. Both Kinnock and Hattersley have launched a campaign to remind the movement and country that socialism arose in the demand for liberty for all. So the very title of the book is partly PR stuff to restore our image from the rape of 'liberty' by the radical Right – even if his actual criticism of them badly underestimates, I think, the intellectual rigour of Hayek and some of his disciples.

But our return to virtue needs formulating carefully. The very first sentence worries: 'The true object of socialism is the creation of a genuinely free society in which the protection and extension of individual liberty is a primary duty of the state'. And later, 'Freedom... is the ultimate objective of socialism'. Substitute 'liberalism' for 'socialism' and the two sentences still make sense. Of course, 'equality' is not forgotten, 'but equality is a means, not an end in itself'.

Now in a sense I see what he means, and can accept it. 'Freedom', and the human spirit and human happiness presumably, can only be exercised by *all* (why does he keep on saying 'the greatest possible number of people', the utilitarian rather than the Kantian) when there are at least no gross inequalities. But is equality only material means and conditions? Isn't equality also a value defining how we perceive others, and egalitarianism both a value and a psychology?

The phrase 'end in itself' creates the confusion. Liberty is an end in itself in the sense that it is an autonomous value, but not in the sense that it is the only end or always an overriding principle. That is the belief of ultra-liberalism. Socialists surely believe in liberty *and* equality: they both condition and limit each other. The problems in a non-exploitative society would be less, but never vanish; we always, endlessly, in a class ridden or a classless society, will have to balance one against the other. And not through, if you please sir, 'the primary duty of the state', but through democratic discussion. It is silly to pretend rhetorically that socialism is a one-crop moral economy: our's is a more complex system of thought because we recognise a plurality of human values, including liberty and equality, not a single overriding end in itself.

Hattersley is more apt to talk of 'fair shares' and 'decent levels' than equality. OK, 'equality' can be a trap. We don't believe in literal equality or the uniform, robot state. But we do believe in *egalitarianism* and that has radically democratic connotations.

There's not much in Hattersley about pluralism, decentralisation and participation. 'There has always been a strange reluctance to set out a clear statement of socialist belief', he shrewdly says (and I wonder whether he was one of those on the NEC for or against producing one, there is a stillborn baby). But this, alas, isn't it. Like the curate's egg, good only in parts.

Furthermore to talk of the 'half-digested' trotskyism of the army of political riff-raff who infiltrated the Labour Party in the late 1960s and early 70s' is both foolishly indiscriminate and intolerant. What is more it ignores how ageing and empty many of the local Labour Parties had become until that great student generation, of himself and his Leader. Not all riff-raff or Militant by any means, revivified the party. A call for realism and reconsiliation has no place for language like that, a fault indeed of the old self-appointed 'true Left'. ●

Bernard Crick

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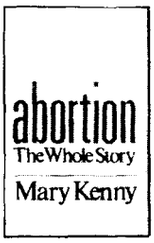

Slippery Customer

Abortion, The Whole Story
Mary Kenny
Quartet Books £9.95 hbk.

Ms Mary Kenny is a slippery customer, and those ignorant of her skill at jumping on and off bandwagons might take her latest campaign offering, **Abortion, The Whole Story**, to be an entirely objective inquiry.

Like those music-hall artistes equipped with suction shoes, she leans at gravity-defying angles to distance herself from the rigid Catholic line on abortion that she personally adheres to. As the nippier Catholic polemicists often do, Ms Kenny refers to her own views as if they were DIY instead of a painting-by-numbers delivered to her ready-made by an authoritarian church.

Though the author admits at the end of her book that she is an anti-abortionist, *albeit* she says a wholly understanding one, she raises matters that are well worth considering.

Few women today feel entirely comfortable with the earlier, simplistic slogan 'Abortion on Demand'. We realise that the issue is now more complex than it once seemed, when back-street abortion was the only remedy, technology had not yet shown us a scan-picture of the unborn child and was not yet able to bring to full term outside the womb babies of an erstwhile lethal immaturity.

Nor can women of conscience now duck recognition of the burden, sometimes moral, sometimes plain human, that abortion puts upon the doctors and nurses who must carry it out.

Ms Kenny has witnessed the various abortion procedures and describes them carefully. She is also objective in describing the feelings of women after abortion, admitting that the experience 'varies almost as much as individuals vary'.

Where men's feelings are involved, she is also restrained. Ms Kenny confines herself to exploring emotions, mentions that 'a sense of powerlessness' is a common experience, cites a macabre and almost unbelievable American finding that 'the majority of men interviewed... said they would like to be present at the abortion' and thankfully lets the subject drop.

She also has a stab at raising adoption as an alternative to abortion, on the grounds that an unborn baby ought to be given a chance of life, but one senses that even she feels that this is a non-starter; possible, perhaps, for those women with 'a spiritual dimension' but an anathema to most of us – one thing to be haunted by the ghost of an aborted baby, another to know the ghost is real.

In the end, the argument resolves itself into two interlocking issues – that technology, by making the foetus 'real' with scans, should make us reconsider the time limit set in this country for routine abortion (later in the UK than in most European countries), while that same technology may soon enable us to terminate a pregnancy before it is legally established, thus discreetly and privately circumventing the law.

But since, as Ms Kenny points out, neither the right-to-choosers nor the anti-abortionists are willing to give an inch on the time question for fear of appearing to concede on broader issues, so 'the usual English notion that you can always find a compromise just does not apply here', we can only hope that technological circumvention will shortly break the deadlock.

In the meantime, I personally wish that Mary Kenny would in future direct her energies to the alleviation of the far greater suffering and sexual oppression of the women of her own country. In her earlier, less 'spiritual' days, she did a good deal. What a pity the embrace of Mother Church has so softened her options. ●

Jill Tweedie

Appliance of Science

The Politics of British Science
Martin Ince
Wheatsheaf £8.95 pbk

Martin Ince's book is a readable and up-to-date guide to the British science policy system. If you want to know what Acard, ABRC, 'Alvey', Esprit and Eureka are then this is the place to look. The statistics of survival in the battle for research funds are also conveniently summarised from UK and OECD sources. As well as the committees and budgets, a picture of scientists at the research front is also given.

Two of the main problems of British science, funding restrictions and the dominance of the military sector, are shown to have been reinforced under Thatcher. However Ince also argues that there have been new initiatives in the promotion of science for economic objectives. These address the two other endemic problems in Britain of very weak policy coordination and lagging industrial research.

'Selectivity' has been the Thatcherite counter to 'expansionist' pleas from science in response to the squeeze. Ince faces up squarely to the challenge. Rather than opting for 'a wave of some budgetary wand', he embraces the notion of choice within science policy – but one located in a popular and democratic context.

The emphasis on choice rather than expansion raises some critical questions about social and economic priorities in science. While some long-term objectives are readily identified, their translation into more immediate policy is not fully resolved by Ince. He presents a strong case for shifting resources from the dominant military and nuclear research sectors to peaceful and socially-useful areas. Although this principle enjoys popular support, there remain very serious differences within the Left over the pace and scale of such a shift.

Such a debate merits further attention. At the same time, Ince shows that Thatcherism has allied the shift to increased selectivity in research funding to industrial goals, defined in narrow economic terms.

Ince goes on to present powerful opinion poll evidence which shows a popular preference for areas such as health and the environment over both narrowly economic, and militaristic, scientific fields. This disparity between popular and official priorities clearly reinforces the case for a democratic transformation of science towards social needs and welfare goals. Yet Ince remains a realist, and acknowledges that 'the consequences of a British failure to secure a reasonable share of world markets in a restructured world economy would be highly unpalatable'.

This poses a key political choice. Should the Left back the incipient trend towards the planning of science for economic goals, even if these are defined in technocratic terms, or should it concentrate its efforts in espousing an alternative orientation towards broader social goals? More specifically, should the pressures for industrially-relevant strategic science be encouraged or criticised? Martin Ince shrinks from making a choice, and instead sees the current changes in scientific practice as creating the opportunity for raising broader issues of social choice in science. Ince looks to initiatives which foster a democratic voice from below through locally-based participative schemes which link the community to scientific institutions. The integration of realist modernisation with democratic transformation is the task of a larger political project, but in the realm of science policy, Martin Ince has had the insight to raise, if not resolve, some of the consequent issues. ●

Fred Steward

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Open Doors to China and Tibet

Until 1980 no more than 2,000 foreigners had ever visited Tibet. One of them was *Alan Winnington, Daily Worker* correspondent in China, whose fascinating memoirs, titled **Breakfast with Mao,** are now published *(Lawrence and Wishart £4.95 pbk).*

It was not until after the Cultural Revolution and Red Guard vandalisations that Tibet was open to visitors.

Nowadays the doors are open. Two new guide books cater particularly for the independent back-packer. *Lonely Planet,* whose **China: A Travel Survival Kit** is now clutched in foreign hands from Shanghai to Shenyang, has produced a similar guide to Tibet. **Tibet: A Travel Survival Kit,** *(Michael Buckley & Robert Strauss, Lonely Planet, £4.95)* shows points of entry, both allowed and in theory banned, from four adjoining Chinese provinces.

The *Collins* guide by *Elizabeth Booz,* **A Guide to Tibet** *(£8.95)* is less adventurous, but strong on Tibetan history. Both books tell you, quite calmly, at what point on the highway to Nepal you can turn left for Mount Everest.

The *Lonely Planet* **China** will shortly be challenged by *Routledge & Kegan Paul's* **The Rough Guide to China** *by Rhonda Evans, Catherine Sanders* and *Chris Stewart (£6.95).* It is also strong on historical detail and some less familiar stopping-places, but it cannot keep up with the pace of change as the door swings open wider. Much more is now possible than it admits says a recent backpacker scanning its text.

This could not have been imagined by Alan Winnington in 1949 as he drank moonshine with the leaders of the Chinese revolution on the eve of their victory.

Winnington went on to report on the Korean War from the Northern side. Accused of treason and deprived of his passport, he then worked in Beijing till he became disillusioned with the Great Leap Forward.

Breakfast With Mao is a curiously incomplete book and not only because Winnington died in the final stage of writing it. There is a sense of conspiratorial mystery and his Korean observations are enigmatic. The exception, is germ warfare, where he explains exactly why he is still convinced it was used.

Winnington becomes more discursive on the joys of China before the Great Leap – the 'golden years' before Mao when, 'half-way to madness', he insisted on trying to create 'overnight socialism' in Tibet and everywhere else. Mao created a fantasy world, Winnington concludes, in which the only winners were time-serving cadres. That is at least half true. The other half – the genuine excitement of mass mobilisation for many Chinese – is now only a historical truth which can never be relived. ●
John Gittings

Trecks in Foreign Parts

In Trouble Again a special issue of travel writing is *Granta's* latest collection *(£3.95).*

Travel writing is a rather hybrid beast; part reportage, part autobiography, part journalism. At the very least it challenges the boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction', in that the recording of the traveller's impressions will always provoke her/him to explore ways to evoke the exotic/frightening for the alien reader.

Perhaps with this in mind, the editors began the collection with Redmond O'Hanlon's extraordinary 'Amazon Adventure', a vivid account of two companions with different responses to the hardship of the jungle. This piece is really a story about hedonism and curiosity, fear and resilience, with the documentary elements as back-up.

By contrast, Hanif Kureishi's 'Bradford' could have been an article in *The Guardian,* locating the complexities of Asian life in a British city. In between these we touch briefly on Cuba, Angola, China, India – a kind of white person's trek around foreign parts.

If I feel somewhat uneasy, it is nothing to do with the quality of the writing. With journeys to so many different places it's as if one were reading a collection of exotic fiction rather than documentary. But then again, perhaps such a collection highlights the fact that when the journey is done, it remains in the traveller's mind as a story to be told to others. ●
Michelene Wandor

Travellers Tracts

Travel literature is a boom area these days. There are many tomes available for armchair consumers of travelling sagas. **A Book of Traveller's Tales** edited by Eric Newby is out in paperback *(Picador £4.95)* and is enjoyable to peruse before a warm fire. *Jan Morris'* offerings *do* encourage the reader to leave the armchair. Her two latest paperbacks are **Among The Cities** *(Penguin £4.95)* and **Journeys** *(Oxford £4.95).*

John Julius Norwich's **A Taste For Travel** *(Papermac £7.95)* is again for the armchair. *Granta* devotes another whole issue to travel.

Martha Gellhorn revisits Cuba, Salman Rushdie in Nicaragua, Angola, Afghanistan... And though it's been on the shelves for a few months now, *Pandora's* **Half The Earth** *(£5.95)* deserves another mention.

Two other quick mentions. *Richard Barber's* **Penguin Guide to Medieval Europe** *(£6.95)* is ever so tasteful, and the 50th anniversary facsimile reissue of *Fodor's* 1936 **On The Continent** is entertaining (and expensive at £13).

These books are all very well, but they won't tell you where to find good bars or the cheapest restaurants. The **Rough Guides** *(Routledge and Kegan Paul)* are well on the way to being the key good advice books of the 1980s. They already cover most of Europe, keep extending (recently China and Eastern Europe soon), and are well worth tracking down.

The familiar names in the guide book world keep coming out. *Fodor's, Frommer's, Baedeker's, Blue Guides, Berlitz* and the like.

I prefer the *Baedeker's* country and city guides because of their excellent typography and design. They are also accurate and genuinely useful.

For exotic mouth-watering reads, I'd just as soon settle down with **Speedbird's Worldwide Brochure** *(British Airways)* or the **Wildlife, Cultural and Wilderness** journeys put out by *Twickers World.* ●
David Brazil

New York New York

Want to visit New York cheaply? Then you'd be wise to acquire the newly-published **Rough Guide to New York** by *Martin Dunsford* and *Jack Holland (Routledge & Kegan Paul, £4.50 pbk).*

New York is certainly 'a helluva town', as the song goes, but it's an expensive one too. The guide's suggestions for cheap accommodation are extremely useful and unusual. Points too for the sections on the outer boroughs and up-state that are too often ignored by visitors, and for the reminders that New York is not just glitz but also home to many unassimilated ethnic groups and homeless people.

But guidebooks are always a little out-of-date and it shows here in the nightclub section (rich, chic hangouts and the passé) and sketchy coverage of upper west side (home of left intellectuals, blacks and Hispanics).

However, if you ignore the laboured and mis-spelt dictionary of New York slang, and chance your luck with the many cheap, ethnic restaurants *not* mentioned, the **Rough Guide to New York** should prove an invaluable introduction to the Big Apple. ●
Anya Schiffrin

The Itch

If you have the itch to travel, **Travellers Health** *(Richard Dawood, Oxford University Press, pbk £6.95)* should cure you. No sniggering jibes at Monteczumas revenge here, just gruesome detail and sound advice parcelled into neat essays custom-made for that long flight or slow train.

Beware of Japanese puffer fish cooked by an amateur; death is preceded by a tingling of the lips . . . Don't forget that the best time to cross the Sahel coincides with the meningitis season. Guinea worm is an alarming and distasteful infection that few travellers catch, but it gets two absorbing pages. The chapter on intestinal parasites is brilliant, and the lines on 'creeping eruption' will change your view of dogs forever.

A wonderful, juicy book that will help people with serious medical problems (like diabetes) to cope with different environments, whilst warning the truly intrepid against local pathologies. Tuck a copy into your toupee before you take off. ●
Steve Iliffe

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LEFT IN LOVE

The cheapest heart search in the country. International pen-pals wanted! Entries last for 2 issues. 30p a word.

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● **Male socialist,** 40. Likes Orwell/ Camus/French Impressionists/Cyndi Lauper and Victoria Wood. Loves children. Seeks humorous female, South of Watford. Box 050.

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● **Lively male socialist-retired.** Would like to meet female 50+. Enjoys theatre, walking, loving, travelling – not always in that order. Rather involved politically. Box 051.

● **Lesbian feminist** seeks friends. Box 052.

● **Distinctive looking,** male history graduate. Aged 25, 5' 7" tall, far Left, would be novelist, non-smoker, non-drinker, seeks woman friend. Box 053.

● **Bright, petite woman** (31) seeks man with sense of humour and liking for the pleasures of life. London/SE. Box 054.

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● **Socialist feminist,** 31 who likes art, soul, salsa, looking for a humorous man. Box 056.

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● **Gay Commie boy** (22) folk-obsessed, loves dancing, and hacking, seeks compatible London-ish haircut for a wild '87. Box 058.

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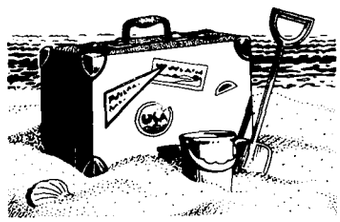
● **Feminist** (29) likes Dorothy Parker, The Bangles, and Mayakowsky. dislikes block votes, nylon and Billy Bragg. Seeks lively reconstructed man for romance but fun will do. Box 062.

● **Wanted.** Michael Ignatieff look-alike or even the real thing. By 30 year-old feminist. Box 063.



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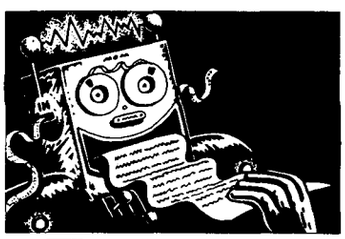

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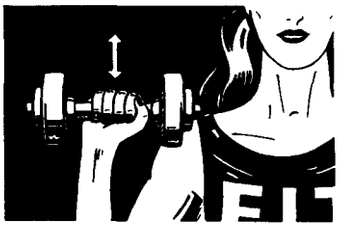

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Lesbian and Gay readers. Send s.a.e. for booklists to Box M.T., Lavendar Menace Bookshops, 11a Forth Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3LE.

● ***Lesbian or Gay?*** *Bisexual? On the left?* Why not get in touch with the CP's Lesbian and Gay Advisory, 224-236 Walworth Road, London SE17.

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● **Radical Scotland.** Scotland's top political magazine, bi-monthly. 70p. 40pp. Socialism; radicalism; Home Rule. Annual subscriptions £5.40. From 48 The Pleasance, Edinburgh, EH8 9TJ.

● **Gay Life.** The fizziest gay magazine in Britain. Monthly from your local pub or bookshop. Subscriptions £9 12 months. Ring 061 236 6026.

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● **Black graduate,** 27, urgently seeks London room at reasonable rent. Box A007.

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MARXISM TODAY READERS GROUPS

Initiating everything from dialectics to discos Marxism Today Discussion Groups are springing up all over Britain. We now have available blank Marxism Today Group posters, plus a range ready-made for meetings on Marxism, Style, and Drugs (more to follow). For these, or help with speakers, advice etc, write to us at Box P001. Marxism Today, 16 St John St., London EC1M 4AY. Same goes, if you want to know if there is a group near you.

● **Glasgow** February discussion on 'The media of the Left' with Alan Lawson, Editor of Radical Scotland and Willie Thompson of Marxism Today Editorial Board. Wickets Hotel, Partick, Wed Feb 18th at 8pm. Details: Box P017.

● **Wellingborough** Discussion Forums for the Spring being planned on Aids, Labour's Defence Policy, and Socialist-Democracy. Interested? get in touch. Box P018.

Queen Mary College, London Meeting to talk aout 'Drugs – Public Enemy Number One?' Thursday February 12th, 1pm in the Students' Union. Box P020.

University College Cardiff All-Wales Gramsci Conference coming in March. Speakers, seminars, entertainment. Details, P024.

Bradford University Feminist Forum with Ros Brunt, Jean Gardiner & Vicky Seddon. Thursday February 25, 7.30pm at Bradford University. Info: Box P025.

Bristol 'Beat the Blues' Marxism Today Festival in May. With workshops, videos, bands etc. Helpers and ideas needed. Contact: P026.

Lewisham Discussion on article in current MT. All welcome. 22nd Feb, 22nd Mar, 26th April (Sundays 4.00-6.00pm). Details 01-635-8661.

NOTE: In all cases, send your enquiry to Marxism Today, 16 ST John St. London EC1M 4AY. Quoting the relevant box number.

EATING OUT

Orexi Restaurant. Greek Food to Take Away. Fully Licensed for parties. Recommended by many M.T. Readers Groups. 236 Hornsey Road, London N7 7LL. Telephone 01/607 7098.

VALENTINE MESSAGES

● **Ki-Ora** Pussy-Love Big.

● **Get** your blancmange, DO? DO.

● **My heart aches,** and my soul is quelled, David.

● **Spank,** Luv Dollop.

● **Paul,** Keep it up, Mark.

EVENTS

● **Breaking Out?** Sexual politics for the 90's. We need help organising our first event. Islington. May 16th. On Men. Phone Jonathan Rutherford 01 272 4756.

● **Stop Sizewell B.** Lobby of Parliament on 4th Feb. Evening meeting with top speakers. Details Friends of the Earth. 01 837 0731.

● **Communist Party** National Student Conference. 21-22 February. A lively mixture of debate, training and fun. Contact Paul Hassan for details. Get those red bases built! 16 St John St. London EC1M 4AY. Phone 01 251 4406.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Bob Lumley is an Italian teacher and freelance writer.

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Umberto Eco

Newsweek in December ran a front cover photo of Umberto Eco with the headline 'The Code Breaker – *Name of the Rose* Author has won Fame and Fortune Interpreting the Signs we Live By'. Inside, a long article celebrates a success crowned by the film adaptation of Eco's novel starring Sean Connery, which is about to go on general release in Britain. To his publisher's delight, the movie has created a strong new demand for *Name of the Rose*, which has sold more than 5m copies, and has been translated into 25 languages.

Here we have not rags to riches, but monastic obscurity to international fame; not the absent-minded professor, but the worldly wordsmith and code breaker. And yet our hero 'looks like a friendly gnome' and 'teaches a subject so complex and abstruse that only a few hundred people in the world have mastered its rudiments'.

Hype? Yes, but then Eco has understood how to handle as well as analyse the media, and plays different roles according to the occasion. Faced with American students' demands for the formula for writing a best-seller, Eco speaks in riddles; surrounded by academic obscurantism, he goes in for plain speaking. In America, he plays the Italian humanist, and in Italy, the American '*techno-buff*'. However, this public recognition in *Newsweek* is appropriate in another sense. For Eco, the relationship America-Italy/Europe has been crucial not only for his recent acclaim but for the development of his writing and cultural analysis since the early 1960s. While this has a personal dimension, it also relates to the dramatic postwar transformation of Italy in which America has loomed large as a model of the future.

'Here we have not rags to riches, but monastic obscurity to international fame; not the absent-minded professor, but the worldly wordsmith and code breaker'

The United States is far from being the only country with which Eco is familiar. He teaches at the University of São Paolo in Brazil as well as at Yale, and is a speaker of five modern languages. However, while he has written about the literature of various countries (particularly France), America occupies a special place in his work; the 'America', that is, of mass culture, not its 'cultured' side. Above all, it has been a place (metaphorical as much as real) for getting and testing ideas – a sort of laboratory.

Eco first made his name with *Apocalittici e Integrati*, which, since its publication in 1964, has been an obligatory point of reference for debates on contemporary culture in Italy. Its importance can be compared with that of Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* or Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*. Basically, through studies of American cartoon-strips (Steve Canyon, Superman, Charlie Brown), television and popular fiction, Eco demonstrated the need to analyse mass cultural forms as texts. Today, it all seems obvious (thanks also to the likes of Eco), but at the time it meant developing an alternative approach to that of the pessimistic enemies of mass culture (from marxists to arch-conservatives), who he calls 'apocalyptic', and to that of optimistic conformists, for whom the expansion of the media was automatically beneficial for all. (Eco, for instance, has been Marshall McLuhan's acutest critic).

Over the years, in fact, Eco's work has shown the different levels and contradictions within mass culture, distinguishing, for example, between 'closed' texts that impose stereotypes which prevent rather than provoke thought, and 'open' ones which show the complexity of things. Perhaps his most important contribution has been to analyse the role of the 'reader', and how people can, and do, interpret television, films or whatever, so that they 're-make' them.

One of the main reasons for Eco's importance as an intellectual in Italy has been his part in intepreting the major cultural changes symbolised, if not induced, by the importation of American cultural models. He was a leading figure in national cultural life long before becoming internationally famous. Especially as he has put his skills as a semiotician to 'practical' use, proving himself an astute cultural operator and valuable political interlocutor and commentator.

Interestingly, Eco has been a failure as an academic in the sense that his proposals for reform at the university have made little headway. To his credit, he has failed to become one of the corrupt 'barons' who use party-politics to feather their nests.

Eco has always seen his role as an intellectual in the broadest sense. There is his prolific scholarship and commitment to teaching (even though he is rich enough not to have to); it is not by chance that Eco wrote a manual for students on thesis-writing which explains the mechanics and know-how involved. Then there is his journalism, especially his regular columns and features for the weekly *L'Espresso*, not to mention his fictional writing. The 'whole' is so impressive because the 'parts' add up to a project and life's endeavour – a rare feat in these opportunistic times.

Above all, Eco regards his 'public', or rather 'publics', as citizens to be engaged in dialogue. This is evident in Eco's own attempt to practise what he preaches about 'open' texts and 'active' readers. When the press in Italy became virtually a vehicle for propaganda, at the height of the terrorism emergency,

Eco: worldly wordsmith

Eco lucidly examined the Red Brigades' media strategy, and debunked the case for a news blackout. Then, from 1968 onwards, he has looked sympathetically as well as critically, at the social movements that have erupted in Italian society, making sense of their seeming 'nonsense' for puzzled bystanders. Against the 'guard-dog' apologists, who have identified democracy with silent majorities, Eco has been one of an honourable band of intellectuals who have seen forms of conflict as the sign of a healthy society and culture.

The success of *Name of the Rose* has made Eco famous as a novelist. However, his best-seller, in the longer term, will probably be judged to have promoted a revival of the gothic genre – a fascination with the Middle Ages – not to have opened a new chapter in Italian contemporary literature (though other writers, like Primo Levi, have suddenly become marketable outside Italy due to the 'Eco-effect').

Hopefully, in the meanwhile, his other writings will become available in translation to a wider public in the same way that Barthes' have. Certainly he has much to teach, not least concerning the positive role intellectuals can invent for themselves in society. ●

Bob Lumley

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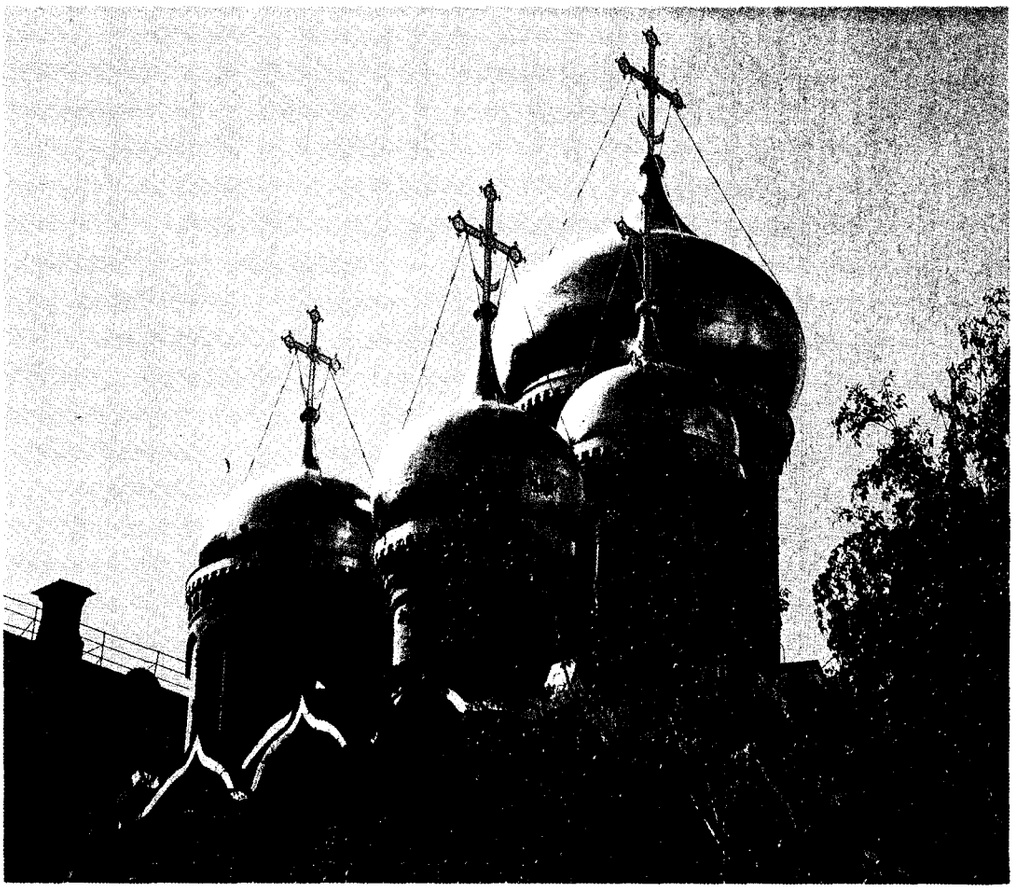

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